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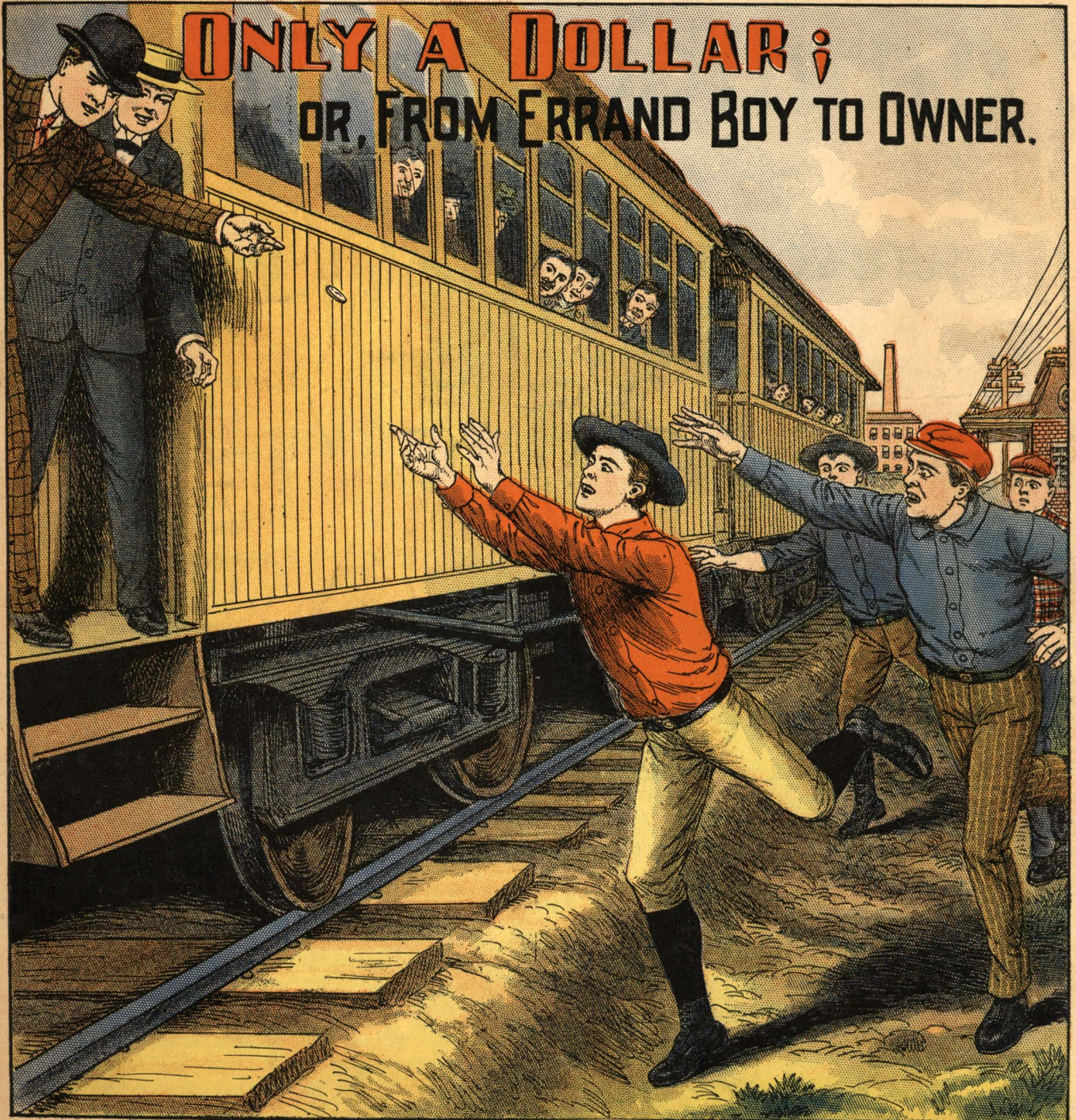
FAME

5 CENTS.

AND

FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.



ONLY A DOLLAR ;
OR, FROM ERRAND BOY TO OWNER.

Fred Towne now darted ahead of the bunch, closely followed by Ferguson. Straining every nerve he succeeded in keeping abreast of the car platform for the required distance. "You've won!" laughed the tourist, tossing the coin into his outstretched hands.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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PRICE 5 CENTS.

ONLY A DOLLAR

OR,

FROM ERRAND BOY TO OWNER

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE IN A PRINTING OFFICE.

Crash!

The half dozen employees of Peter Koop's printing establishment on Main Street, Leesburg, looked up in a startled way to find Fred Towne, errand boy, struggling with the ruins of a foundry form on the floor which a stone-hand had sent him to fetch.

The cause of the disaster was a banana peel dexterously placed in Fred's path by Jude Ferguson, an apprentice, who had a mania for mischief in general and a personal grouch against Towne in particular.

"Now you've done it!" chuckled Jude, as pleased as a mud lark at low tide. "The foreman won't do a thing to you! That was a 'live' form, and I was goin' to take it to the foundry as soon as Benson had made a correction in it."

It was hardly necessary to remind Fred that the damage was a serious one.

The revised proof of the form had just come in, with a solitary and unimportant correction marked on it, and Foreman Gregg had written the word "Rush" in blue pencil across one corner of the sheet.

The "Rush" was intended for the instruction of the foundry—that the plate was wanted as soon as possible.

As Fred was picking himself up, and regarding the wreck with a rueful face, the foreman came over to see what had happened.

When he saw that the foundry form he was in such a

sweat over was irremediably "pied," his brow grew as black as a thunder gust.

We won't repeat what he said as he glared at the unfortunate boy.

Any one who has worked under the average job printing foreman knows that the responsibilities of his position doesn't improve his temper, and he is apt to speak to the point when things go wrong.

Foreman Jim Gregg was red headed and more than ordinarily quick tempered.

Furthermore, he was Jude Ferguson's brother-in-law.

Jude was always carrying some story to him about Fred which inflamed the natural dislike he entertained against the errand boy.

He would have fired Fred long before only that he found him uncommonly useful, much smarter at the business than Jude, who was naturally lazy, and shirked his work whenever he could.

Jude was a year older and had been a year longer in the printing office than Towne, but he didn't know half as much about the "art preservative."

Fred was a natural born printer, and took to the trade like a duck to water; Jude hated the business, as he would have hated any business for that matter, because there was work attached to it.

Consequently, Jude learned the "rudiments" very slowly, and his brother-in-law was forever calling him down about something or another.

Jude didn't care for that as long as the pay envelope came his way every Saturday afternoon, and there were no deductions taken out for tardiness.

The employees of Peter Koop worked from 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m.—ten hours.

The nine-hour law was in effect, then, in union as well as the more important "open shops," but it wasn't in operation in Leesburg.

In any event, Mr. Koop wasn't in favor of the shorter work day.

He paid his workmen as little as he could and got as much out of them for the money as he could.

His "time-slips" compelled the men to account for every five minutes.

When these had passed under the eagle eye of the foreman every morning and had been turned into the office, Mr. Koop examined them himself, and he usually had something to say to the foreman afterward which didn't make Gregg feel any happier.

The only way Gregg could ease his ruffled mind was to call the man or men down, though he knew, having passed the slips himself, that they were not guilty.

From a business point of view, Gregg was a good foreman; you couldn't fool him worth a cent.

He knew how a job ought to be set, and he could tell at a glance from the proof about the time required to put it together.

Nevertheless, he wasn't popular with any one but the boss.

Neither was Jude Ferguson—the men hated him, and with good reason, for he was always snooping around and carrying information to his brother-in-law.

Fred Towne, on the contrary, was a first favorite.

Probably that was the chief reason why neither Jude nor Gregg liked him.

Fred knew where every type in the office was to be found; Jude never, or at least very seldom, could find a case when he had a piece of copy to work on.

When there was a rush, the foreman frequently sent Fred to help a journeyman on the "straight matter."

If the copy was "reprint," the workman let him set a part of the "display," and he never failed to do it well—so well, in fact, that the men often trusted him with written copy having displayed lines in it.

Gregg had noticed him doing work sometimes not expected of him, and in this way got a line on his evident ability.

Therefore, he found him too valuable to discharge merely for personal motives.

He found it more profitable to vent his grouch against the boy by lashing him with his tongue.

Fred being an orphan, and compelled to work for his keep, had to put up with his luck.

He was always cheerful under strenuous circumstances, and the men admired his good temper and grit.

They would have taught him the road to good fellowship via the bar of their favorite saloon, only Fred wouldn't drink nor smoke.

He had promised his dying mother never to do either, and he had the strength of will to keep his word.

Besides, he had plenty of opportunity to see the effects of too much drink.

It frequently made driveling idiots of smart typos of a Saturday night.

He also discovered that some of the best compositors in town were the greatest lushers.

Just why this should be he couldn't determine, but the fact was not to be gainsaid.

Gregg knew it, too, for he had been there himself, but had reformed.

"Can't you look where you're putting your feet, Towne?" roared the foreman, kicking the offending banana peel under a frame. "Get a paper and gather up that pi. You can distribute it after you eat your lunch."

He snatched the revised proof from the boy's hand, and put a couple of men at resetting the job in a hurry.

"Better get a shovel," snickered Jude to Fred.

"I suppose you didn't throw that banana peel in my way?" said Fred, looking hard at Ferguson.

"Me? Of course not. Why should I do it?"

"I saw you eating a banana a moment ago."

"What of it? You didn't see me throw no skin down on the floor."

"No. But you might have done it, just the same."

"Oh, rats! Get a broom and sweep up the mess. If you wasn't a hamfatter at the business, you wouldn't have pied the form. You never seen me do anythin' like that?"

"Yes, I have. I've seen you pi a case of type several times."

"You're dreamin'. I kin handle a case of type better'n you."

Fred took no further notice of his enemy, but went and got a piece of newspaper and threw the type in it.

Then he placed the furniture and foundry bearers in their places, and put the patent quoins in a drawer.

He laid the pi on a convenient window sill until he was ready to distribute it.

The stone-hand who had been ready to correct the demolished form came over to him and said:

"I saw Ferguson throw that peel under your feet. You ought to give him a calling down about it. If he worked such a funny game on me, I wouldn't leave anything larger than a grease spot of him."

"What's the use of calling him down?" replied Fred. "It wouldn't do any good. One of these days I'll forget myself, and then there'll be something doing in his direction. I don't believe in scrapping, but there's a limit to everything. I suppose if I went for him, Gregg would bounce me, and I can't afford to lose my job."

"I don't believe you'd lose it; but if you did, the boys would stand by you."

"How would they?"

"They'd either quit work till you were taken back, or they'd chip in and make a pot so you wouldn't starve while looking for another place."

Fred believed him, for he knew that, whatever might be their faults, printers are, as a rule, always ready to help out a fellow workman when they believe he's deserving of their sympathy.

"I don't mean to be the cause of any inconvenience to the men," said Fred.

At that moment the foreman called him to strike off a couple of proofs on the proof-press, and he hurried away.

The stone-hand slipped into one of the alleys and told two of the jobbers the cause of the accident, and in five

minutes even Gregg knew that Jude was at the bottom of the recent trouble.

CHAPTER II.

JUDE FERGUSON IN TROUBLE.

It was early in the summer and there was plenty of light after six o'clock when work ceased in Keep's printing office.

All hands took off their aprons, completed the making out of their time-slips, and then hung them on a hook beside the foreman's desk, which was perched on an elevated platform at one side of the room.

The presses in operation were stopped about fifteen minutes before quitting time in order to allow time for washing rollers, etc.

As the hands passed out they rang up their numbers on the time clock, and the overworked bookkeeper came in afterward, abstracted the sheet, and substituted a fresh one to receive the morning impressions.

Some of the printers and pressmen made a bee-line for the saloon on the corner, but the majority went home, glad that the day's work was over.

Fred Towne lived at the humble home of a railroad man employed in the freight yards of the Leesburg & Western Railroad, not far away.

The man's name was Valentine, and he had a sixteen-year-old daughter named Eva, who was very partial to the young boarder.

She admired Fred not only because he was a good-looking boy, but because he was manly and straightforward.

She was a very pretty girl herself, vivacious and even-tempered.

Fred thought her an uncommon nice girl, and they were as thick as two peas in a pod.

Mrs. Valentine had taken a great liking for the boy, in common with her husband, and had such confidence in him that she permitted Eva to go anywhere with him—a privilege accorded to no one else, for the good woman kept a watchful eye over her only daughter.

She felt assured that Fred would protect Eva under any and all circumstances, as though he were her brother.

And she was right.

As Fred was on his way to the Valentine home that afternoon several of the compositors detained him in front of the saloon for about ten minutes to speak about the incident of the pied foundry form.

They denounced the affair as a scurvy trick of Ferguson's, and were of the unanimous opinion that Towne ought to take it out of Jude's hide at the first chance he got.

Fred finally got away from them and continued on his way.

His friend, Tom Benedict, who was an advanced apprentice in the Koop office, and Jude, also lived in the neighborhood of the railroad yard and the Valentine cottage.

Usually Fred walked home with Tom, but this occasion was an exception.

As he approached a corner grocery within a block of the cottage, he spied Eva Valentine coming out of the store with a jug in her hand.

As she started toward her home, Jude Ferguson, whom she was acquainted with but didn't like even a little bit,

suddenly made his appearance from around the corner and confronted her with a smirk on his freckled countenance.

"Goin' home, Eva?" he said. "I'll walk with you."

"You needn't trouble yourself," she answered tartly.

"Why not? Ain't I good enough for you to walk with?"

"I prefer walking by myself."

"You wouldn't say that if Fred Towne came along," he said crustily, for he liked Eva and was jealous of Fred, another reason for disliking his shop-mate.

"Oh, Fred is a privileged person. He lives with us."

"What if he does. That doesn't give him the exclusive privilege to walk with you. I want a chance once in a while myself."

"And suppose I don't want you to?" she replied, saucily.

"Why don't you want me to?"

"I have my reasons."

"What are your reasons?" persisted Jude, preventing her from going on.

"I'm not obliged to tell them if I don't want to," she replied, independently. "Let me pass."

"I'm goin' to walk with you, anyway," said Jude, following her up.

"No, you're not," she said, making a move to cross the street.

He kept close at her side, however, and she got angry.

"I don't want you to follow me," she flashed.

"I'm goin' to walk right along with you just because you say I mustn't. I like you, and——"

"Well, I don't like you. So there!"

"I s'pose you like Fred Towne, don't you?" he sneered.

"Yes, I do. Now are you satisfied?"

"No, I'm not. If you don't let me walk along with you, I'll punch his face when I see him again. I kin lick him with my eyes shut, and I'll do it, too."

Fred heard his last remark very clearly, for he was now close at hand, although unperceived by either Jude or Eva.

Jude's words nettled him, and his attitude toward Eva didn't soften his feelings toward Ferguson, so he stepped up and said quietly:

"So you can whip me with your eyes shut, can you, Ferguson? Well, you've the opportunity to make good now, if you want to."

Eva and Jude turned quickly around.

The girl, with a pleased look, stepped quickly to his side, while Ferguson glared furiously at the boy he hated.

As Jude made no effort to carry out his threat, Fred gave his attention to Eva.

"Where have you been? To the grocery?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're bound home, I guess, so come on."

They walked off together, leaving Jude gazing after them with a malignant expression in his eyes.

"I'll fix you, Fred Towne!" he muttered. "I'll get you bounced from the shop, see if I don't. Yah! How I hate you!"

He followed on some distance behind Fred and Eva, for he lived two blocks beyond the Valentine cottage, on the same street.

Jude tried to get his brother-in-law to discharge Fred

next day, which was Saturday, but Gregg laughed at him, and Jude was intensely disappointed.

The only way he saw of revenging himself on Fred was to annoy him, for, though bigger and apparently stronger, he did not have the sand to invite a personal encounter.

On the following Monday, as Fred was picking up a handful of type from one of the stones to distribute, Jude jostled his arm and the type went to pi.

Fred sprang around, but Ferguson glided away quickly and took up something to do close to his brother-in-law, and so Fred was checkmated for the time being.

Later on, when Fred was passing a big sixteen-page pamphlet form of solid type, which had been brought from the pressroom and stood up against the end of a frame, Jude tried to trip up Towne so that he'd fall against it with force sufficient to cause it to spring enough to bring about a wholesale case of pi.

He failed, however, and got a slap across the jaw for his pains.

As he backed away a press feeder fetched him a sly kick in the rear, and, turning upon his fresh aggressor, he struck his head against the corner of a case and uttered a howl that focussed Gregg's attention on him.

"I'll get square with you," he snarled, looking at Fred as though he was the cause of his trouble.

Fred laughed and walked on.

Then Jude turned on the pressman.

"What did you kick me for?"

"Who kicked you?"

"You did, you big stiff!"

"Oh, forget it!" replied the man, walking off.

Jude was mad enough to chew a ten-penny nail.

"Here, Jude," shouted Gregg, "give Ogden a lift with that form."

If there was one thing Ferguson hated, it was to assist in hoisting a big chase full of type on to a stone.

But he had to obey when ordered by the foreman, and he started in to do it very grudgingly indeed.

He went so awkwardly about the job that he caught one of his fingers between the iron chase and the wooden rim of the stone.

He howled murder and let go of the chase.

His end went down like a flash of light, denting a hole in the floor, and then fell over on its face, dragging Ogden with it.

Fortunately, the iron quoins held all, despite the jar, and the form was saved.

Gregg was so mad, though, that he collared his brother-in-law, and, unmindful of the relationship, booted him twice.

Jude grabbed a mallet and made a motion as if to throw it at Gregg.

The foreman seized his uplifted arm and ordered him out of the office.

He went but he was back next day, having patched the difficulty up.

His discomfiture, however, was a source of great satisfaction to the men.

A small pamphlet bindery, employing half a dozen girls, was attached to the Koop printing office.

Jude used to go in there and talk to the girls during lunch time.

He soon made himself so disliked there that none of the girls would have anything to say to him any more.

This riled him, and he began playing tricks on them to get square.

One of the girls reported him, and Gregg ordered him to stay out of the bindery.

Discovering which girl had told on him, he decided to be revenged on her.

He found that the girl, whose name was Edith Clark, brought her lunch in a small box and left it on a shelf.

So he got a similar box, enclosed a live mouse with enough of miscellaneous stuff to weight it so as to deceive the girl when she handled it, and then watching his chance, changed the boxes.

When noon came and Miss Clark opened the box, the mouse sprang at her.

She promptly fainted and pandemonium ensued in the bindery.

Fred happened to be in there at the time, for the girls liked to talk to him, and he stopped the panic by chasing the mouse.

While the other girls were resuscitating the unconscious girl, Fred examined the box, saw Jude's name inside, and judged he was the author of the trouble.

If he had needed any further proof, Ferguson's grinning countenance at the open doorway would have furnished it.

He sprang suddenly on the young rascal, and before he could escape caught him by the ear and marched him into the bindery.

By this time Miss Clark had come out of her faint.

Fred explained the case against Jude, the box was looked at, and he was pronounced guilty by the girls.

"Get down on your knees and apologize," ordered Fred.

"I will, like fun!" snarled Ferguson. "Let go my ear, will you?"

"Not until you've begged Miss Clark's pardon."

"I'll die first," roared Jude.

At that moment Tom Benedict appeared.

Edith Clark was his best girl.

"What's the trouble?" he wanted to know.

Fred explained the situation.

Then Tom took a hand in the matter, and Jude found it convenient to beg the girl's pardon very humbly.

When they released him he shook his fist at Fred and threatened dire vengeance on him, and there wasn't any doubt but he meant what he said.

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A DOLLAR.

Ferguson associated with a rough crowd of boys who had formed themselves into an organization called "The Night Hawks."

The name was appropriate because they met only at night in an old house on the outskirts of the town, and they seldom returned to their homes until long after midnight.

Jude was not an especial favorite with them, but he was a member of the gang, and that counted so far as enlisting their sympathies in his behalf.

Having woke up to the fact that he couldn't injure Fred

Towne much in the way he had counted on, he took counsel with the gang.

They advised him to say nothing and saw for a while until some scheme could be hatched up against Towne that promised success.

Accordingly, Ferguson quit playing tricks on his enemy in the printing office, and Fred imagined that Jude had learned a salutary lesson.

That was where he deceived himself.

On the Saturday afternoon following the bindery incident Fred and Tom left the office at five o'clock, which was the hour the shop shut down on that day, and started for the railroad station to see the Pacific Express come in and depart.

Ferguson, and a crony of his named Morton, followed on behind them.

The four boys seated themselves on a pile of sleepers between the two tracks opposite the station, and waited for the train to come in.

Fred and Tom paid no attention to Jude and his companion Morton, and conversed by themselves.

They were talking over a trolley trip they had arranged to take next day with Eva Valentine and Edith Clark, who had already consented to accompany them.

Jude was listening to them, and occasionally nudging his associate, and then whispering a word or two in his ear.

Presently the long drawn out whistle of the express sounded down the line, and the boys turned their faces in that direction.

All they could see was the front of the locomotive coming down upon them like some steel-clad monster belching a thin vapor from its nostrils.

They could hear the clinkety clack of the ponderous wheels singing along the rails, and the low hum of the drivers swelling gradually into a roar as the long train, with the air brakes set, dashed up alongside the station and came to a rest.

The connecting platforms of two Pullman sleepers stood in front of the four boys, and a couple of smart-looking young tourists were standing with their backs against the car, talking and smoking cigarettes.

They soon noticed the boys seated on the sleepers and began to chaff them.

Finally one of them put his hand in his pocket and drew out a big, shining new silver coin.

"Do you see this dollar?" he asked, with a broad grin.

"Sure we see it," replied Fred.

"Goin' to let us scramble for it?" asked Jude, springing up eagerly.

"Where do we have to run to to get it?" inquired Ferguson.

"When the train starts," explained the tourist, "you boys must start, too, and try to keep up with the platform of this car. The chap who heads the race as far as yonder switch gets the dollar. Are you on?"

"Bet your life we are," chorussed the boys.

"Line up, then," said the young tourist.

"I'm going to offer it as a prize to the best runner among you," replied the sprucely dressed young chap.

Word of the impending race was conveyed through the two Pullmans, and the passengers began sticking their

heads out of the windows to watch the contest, which aroused great interest and amusement.

At that moment the conductor on the platform cried "All aboard!" and waved the usual signal to the engineer.

As the train pulled out the race began, first at a jog trot and then at a more rapid pace.

As the cars gathered headway the boys began to spurt, for the prize was eagerly desired by each.

The tourists encouraged the runners in every way they could, while their eyes sparkled with fun.

Some of the passengers began to cheer, the ladies waving their handkerchiefs.

More heads popped out of the other cars, for the people aboard got wind that something out of the usual was going on.

Fred Towne now darted ahead of the bunch, closely followed by Ferguson.

Straining every nerve, he succeeded in keeping abreast of the car platform for the required distance.

"You've won!" laughed the tourist, tossing the coin into his outstretched hands.

Then the long train swept by, the passengers giving the boys a parting cheer.

Fred gripped the shiny dollar in one hand as he slowed down.

Jude was furious with disappointment.

He had fully calculated on winning the money himself, for he was a good runner.

There wasn't any doubt but that it had been a fair race, and that the winner was the fleetest of the party.

That fact, however, didn't console Jude.

He wanted that dollar, and besides it was gall and wormwood to him to see Fred, especially, win the money.

"I ought to have half that prize," he snarled, with angry eyes.

"What for? I won it, didn't I?" retorted Towne.

"We was both even when he pitched you the money."

"Bosh!" interjected Tom Benedict. "You were two feet behind Fred."

"That's a lie! I wasn't. I'll leave it to Morton."

"How could he tell?" said Tom. "He was away behind when you two finished."

"So was you behind," growled Jude.

"I was almost up to you. I could have touched you with my hand, but I couldn't have reached Fred nohow."

"You say that 'cause you're his friend."

"I say it because it's the truth. I know what I'm talking about."

"You don't know nothin'," snorted Jude.

"Well, the chap who offered the money tossed it to Fred and said he'd won. He was the judge of the race, and what he said goes."

Ferguson couldn't go behind that, so with a nasty look at Fred and Tom he drew off with Morton, and they jumped the fence and walked toward the street beyond.

"Jude will hate you worse than ever after this," chuckled Tom Benedict.

"That doesn't worry me any," replied Fred. "There never has been any love lost between us. I don't fancy fellows of his stamp, anyway."

"Well, you're a lucky boy. You'll have a whole dollar to spend to-morrow."

"No, I won't."

"Why not? Got any special use for that dollar you won?"

"Yes. It's the only dollar I have ever owned in the world, and I'm going to keep it as a lucky piece. I've an idea that as long as I hold on to it I'll get more."

"What put that into your head?"

"I couldn't tell you. But I feel it in my bones."

"Then I'd freeze on to it if I felt that way."

"I mean to."

"Maybe Mr. Koop will give you a raise in your pay."

"Don't you believe it. It's like drawing a tooth to get a raise out of him."

"I believe you. I'm a two-thirder, but I don't get two-thirds of a journeyman's wages."

"You ought to, for you're worth it."

"That's right. And you're worth more than \$4. Jude gets \$6, and you can set type all around him. Besides, there are a lot of things you can do that he couldn't tackle to save his life, and he's been a year longer at the business."

"He'll never be worth his salt as a printer—he's too lazy and careless."

"He'll never be worth his salt at anything if he don't mend his ways."

"He wouldn't last under Gregg if they weren't related."

"Nor under any other foreman."

They walked back to the station and then started for home.

Fred pulled the silver prize he had won out of his pocket and looked at it.

It felt good to own that much—a whole hundred cents' worth.

"Only a dollar," he said. "When will I have another to match it?"

"That's a conundrum, I guess," laughed Tom. "Silver dollars, or paper ones, either, are not growing on bushes for people to pluck."

"That's right—they aren't. If they were——"

"Nobody would work. Neither are they lying around in the road for folks to stumble over."

"That's right, too. Hello! what's that?"

"What's what?"

Fred made a swoop at something in the gutter.

When he straightened up, he held a dirty, greenish bit of paper in his fingers.

Many people had no doubt passed that way within the last hour or two, yet none had seen it.

It was a bank bill worth \$50.

"Great scissors!" exclaimed Tom. "A fifty dollar bill!"

Fred gazed at the note with open mouth and eyes.

The bright new dollar in his other hand faded into insignificance before this old dirt-begrimed piece of faded green paper.

"Talk about luck," continued Tom, "it's coming your way by the raft full. I never found anything larger than a nickle in my life, and that was so smooth that I had a lot of trouble passing it."

"Somebody must have lost this," said Fred.

"That's evident. People don't usually plant fifty dollar

bills in the gutter for somebody else to pick up and blow in."

"I wonder if I could find out who lost it?"

"Are you anxious to find the owner?" asked Tom in surprise.

"Fifty dollars is a lot of money," replied Fred, solemnly.

"You're right, it is."

"The person who lost it might not be able to afford it."

"That isn't your funeral."

"If I knew who that person was I'd——"

"Return it, eh?" laughed Tom, incredulously.

"I certainly would."

"You'd be a——"

"Would you keep this money, Tom, if you could find the owner?"

"No; but I wouldn't go around town asking people if they'd lost it."

"Of course you couldn't do that; but it might be advertised for."

"Go on! It would be a waste of good money to advertise for a lost bill. How could money be identified?"

"This bill could."

"How?"

"By that red Maltese cross on the back, and the fact that it's been torn and pasted together."

"Ho! That don't count for much."

"I think it counts for a good deal."

"What are you going to do? Keep the bill for a while on the possibility that the owner might show up?" asked Tom, wonderingly.

"Yes."

"Say, you're a phenomenon, Fred. The owner will never show up if you keep the bill for a hundred years."

"I haven't any particular need to spend the money at present, so I might as well keep it intact."

"You can do that, of course. You can use the silver dollar."

Fred shook his head.

"I'll change the fifty before I do that. If it hadn't been for the dollar I shouldn't have found the bill. I told you I believed it would bring me luck, and you see it has."

"I wouldn't swear to it," replied Tom, doubtfully.

"Well, that's my opinion," replied Fred, in a positive tone, as they came to a stop in front of the Valentine cottage.

"All right, old chap, have it your own way," answered Tom. "I hope you'll find some more on the strength of it. Good-by. I'll see you in the morning."

Tom went on his way and Fred entered the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MILL AT PLAINVILLE.

Supper was nearly ready when Fred entered the combined sitting- and dining-room.

Eva was setting the table, for it was almost time for her father to get home.

"What do you suppose we've got for supper to-night, Fred?" she asked the young printer.

"I'm not good at guessing riddles, Eva," he replied.

"It's something you like."

"Is it? That makes it harder to guess, for I like most anything that tastes good," he laughed.

"But you like this particularly."

"Then it must be pork and beans."

"That's just what it is."

"Then I'm right in it. In fact, I've been right in it since I left the office."

"How is that?"

"In the first place, four of us—Tom Benedict, Jude Ferguson, Slatts Morton and me—ran a race in the yard with the Pacific Express for a dollar, and I won the money."

"You ran a race with the Pacific Express!" exclaimed Eva, opening her pretty eyes. "Why, how could you do that?"

Fred told her all about the incident.

"My, that must have been fun!" she cried.

"It was, for everybody concerned. And it was profitable for me. There's the dollar. Look at it. Doesn't it shine?"

"It's a new one."

"That's what it is. Well, as Tom and I were coming up the road, what do you suppose I found?"

"I'll never guess," she answered, shaking her head.

"A fifty dollar bill."

"You didn't!" she ejaculated in astonishment.

"Well," said Fred, bringing forth the dirty, mutilated and cross-marked bill, "is that fifty dollars or isn't it?"

Eva had to admit that it was when she looked at it.

"My goodness! Aren't you fortunate?"

"Yes, I think I am," admitted Fred.

"Whereabouts in the road did you find it?"

"In the gutter, not far from the grocery."

"You're rich, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm worth fifty-one dollars at the present moment, if no one claims the bill."

"How could any one claim it?"

"I couldn't say. The possibility is small, I suppose."

"I should think so. There isn't one chance in a thousand."

"I hope I'm honest enough to give it up if the owner did turn up."

"I'm sure you are; but you needn't worry. No one will ever claim that bill."

Eva finished setting the table, and in a few minutes her father came in.

Supper was put on the table and all sat down to it.

Before the meal was over Fred related how he had come into possession of the fifty-one dollars.

Mr. Valentine congratulated him on his luck, and asked him what he was going to do with the money.

"I'm going to keep them both. The dollar for good luck and the fifty till I have a pressing need to change it."

When he went to his room soon afterward he put the money in his trunk.

Later on he and Eva went out for a walk, as they did nearly every Saturday evening.

He bought an evening paper, and when they got home they looked over it together.

On the first page was the story, under lurid headlines, of a murder that had been committed the night before, but only discovered that afternoon.

The victim was a reputed miser, named Abel Ashfield, one of the oldest residents of Leesburg.

He lived with an old housekeeper, known as Martha Wills, in a large and roomy mansion on the suburbs.

It developed that he had kept all his money and valuables in a small safe set into the wall of his bedroom.

This had been broken open and everything abstracted by the villains who had perpetrated the crime.

The police were at work on the case, but it did not appear that they had any definite clue as to the identity of the scoundrels.

They had got into the house through a rear window in the basement, and had departed the same way with their booty.

How much money they had secured, and what else in the way of plunder they had made off with, was not known, as Abel Ashfield never told anybody about his affairs, not even his housekeeper, who had no idea what he was worth.

The old man had two nephews, one the son of his brother, a steady-going man who was cashier in the bank of the near-by town; the other, a good-for-nothing fellow, named Jim Harker, the son of his sister.

Ashfield had held no communication with either for many years, so the housekeeper said, though the latter had made several attempts of late to see his uncle.

That was the whole story, as picked up by the reporters, to the time of going to press, and it seemed to be up to the police to do something if the murderers were to be apprehended and the stolen property recovered.

"That's tough on old Ashfield," said Fred. "I remember seeing him once on the street—he was a small, white-haired man, with a face that looked like faded parchment. He looked as if he might be all of seventy years old. He didn't dress as if he was worth anything to speak of. One of the compositors at the office told me that he guessed the old man had no money, only the old house in which he lived. At any rate, he lived in a way that gave color to that opinion."

"I don't like to read about murders," said Eva, with a shudder.

"It isn't the most cheerful kind of reading, I'll admit," replied Fred.

"It's awful to think that a poor old man like him should be killed for what little money he might have had."

"You can't tell but what he had a good deal, if he really was a miser. The fact that he had a safe in the house would look as if he was well fixed."

"I do hope the rascals will be caught and punished."

"It is to be hoped they will. It might be that the old man's shiftless nephew had a hand in the crime."

"That's too dreadful to think of. His own flesh and blood. No, no," said Eva, "that doesn't seem possible."

"Such things have happened before. Even sons have been known to murder their fathers, either for money or some other reason."

"Horrible!" exclaimed the girl.

"This is a pretty wicked world, if one is to judge by what he sees printed in the daily papers. Leesburg is a paradise compared with a big city like New York or Chicago. Well, it's getting late; we'd better go to bed. We've got a nice long trolley ride before us in the morning."

Tom Benedict brought Edith Clark to the Valentine

cottage a little after nine next morning, and Fred and Eva were all ready to accompany them.

The trip they had planned over the electric road would take them to Plainville, twelve miles away, and they expected to walk around the pretty suburbs of that town and have a modest meal at a restaurant before returning to Leesburg.

It was, an ideal day for the ride, and the young people enjoyed the trip to the other town immensely.

As they sat near the front of the car, which was well filled, they did not notice that Jude Ferguson, Slatts Morton, and a couple of their gang were standing on the rear platform.

Such, however, was the case, and the young rascals cast furtive glances at them occasionally as the car speeded along.

When Fred signalled the car to stop on reaching Plainville, Jude and his companions got off quickly and retired under a near-by tree.

Then they followed Fred, Tom and the girls at a distance up the street.

"You heard them say that they were goin' to look at the old mill?" said one of the shadows.

"Slatts and me heard Towne and Benedict plannin' things yesterday at the station," replied Jude. "Didn't we, Slatts?"

"That's right," answered Morton, nodding his head. "They're goin' to the old mill that folks say is haunted, and then they're goin' back to town to eat."

"Then we'd better git to the mill before 'em. The question is how kin we separate 'em, so that we kin get a chance at Towne. We don't want to monkey with Benedict if we kin help it. One is enough for us at a time, and we ain't out for his scalp."

While the rascals were struggling with this question they made their way toward the mill in question as fast as their legs could carry them.

It was clear that they had designs only on Towne, and it took some figuring to find a practical way of carrying out their purpose.

At length they reached the dilapidated structure, which stood on the banks of a stream connecting with the river that ran up to Leesburg and further on.

Walking inside they found the first floor consisted of two rooms, a large and a small one, both bare of everything but dust and cobwebs.

There was a hole in the floor of the small room through which projected a part of the huge oaken upright which had supported the driving shaft of the mill.

A jagged hole in the side of the building, overlooking the stream, showed where the shaft had connected with the water-wheel, now gone to ruin and half submerged in the water and mud.

There was also a trap-door in a corner of the room which the boys did not investigate, but contented themselves with peering through the hole into the dark and damp-smelling depths of the cellar, where a portion of the old machinery still stood in varying stages of decay.

They could not see much, and their curiosity did not induce them to pursue any exploration in that direction.

Returning to a passage between the rooms they mounted a stout stairway to the regions above, where they found

evidences of recent occupancy by what they supposed were tramps.

Jude looked out of one of the front windows and saw Fred, Tom, and the girls approaching at a distance.

"Here they come, fellers," he said. "We'll hide in this big closet."

The four young rascals got out of sight and waited.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MILL.

"Is that the old mill?" asked Eva Valentine, as they drew nearer. "It looks like an ordinary building."

"That's the old mill," replied Fred. "The big wheel is gone, and that's why it doesn't look like a mill any more."

They walked around it to the rear, looked down into the stream where the remains of the wheel lay, just as it had fallen, and then came back to the front.

"Come on in," said Fred.

"It's awfully dirty looking inside," said Edith Clark, thinking of her Sunday gown and the consequences that might ensue if she brushed up against the walls.

Finally they were induced by the boys to enter, and they walked around in a very careful manner.

Fred piloted the way about, as he was of an inquiring mind, and liked to look into things.

"Is this place haunted?" asked Eva, with a little shudder.

"That's what people say, but I don't take any stock in the report," replied Fred. "Most every old place is said to be haunted more or less. You aren't afraid in the bright daylight, are you?"

"No-o," she replied, clinging to his arm, and looking fearfully around the small inner room which, owing to the fact that it had but one window, and that boarded up, was not particularly cheerful.

"I wonder what's to be seen down stairs?" said Tom, trying to make out something through the broken hole in the floor.

"I guess that's where the machinery was," replied Fred.

"There's a trap-door," pointed Benedict. "Let's you and I go down and take a look."

"No, you mustn't go," objected Eva, grabbing her escort by the sleeve.

Edith also vetoed the proposal.

"It won't take us but a minute," said Tom. "You girls can wait here."

But the girls wouldn't have it, so the boys gave up the idea and all four started back for the front room.

"Well, I'm going to see what's up stairs," said Fred, as they were crossing the passage.

Before any objection could be raised he was half way up the stairs.

Tom was about to follow, but the girls declared that they didn't want to be left alone.

"Then I'll wait till Fred returns," replied Benedict.

Fred gained the floor above and looked around.

There was nothing particular to see there, and he was on the point of retracing his steps when he spied the roomy closet.

Curious to see if there was anything in it, he went towards it, grabbed the handle and pulled it open.

Two arms shot out like a flash, catching him by the collar, and he was jerked forward into the gloom of the closet.

Before he could recover from his surprise, Jude and his companions had him down on the floor and were pounding him for all they were worth.

Fred, however, was a game boy, and the darkness prevented his enemies from doing very effective work.

Half their blows landed on his back and shoulders, and did not hurt him greatly.

In a moment or two he started to defend himself in a way that promised to make it interesting for his unknown assailants.

The struggle made a noise that was heard below, and Tom, wondering what was the matter, sprang up the stairs.

At that moment a portion of the closet floor gave way under Fred, and he went down with a crash out of sight.

Jude followed, but saved himself by catching the jagged timbers.

He roared "Help!" and was caught and pulled up by his comrades.

The young rascals were alarmed, for they believed their victim had been killed, and they made a dash to escape from the building.

Slatts Morton and Jude were the first to reach the opening above the stairway, and in their hurry did not notice Tom Benedict coming up.

The result was they collided with him, and the three went rolling down the stairs, to the great terror of Eva and Edith, who screamed shrilly.

The other two of Jude's gang got as far as the stairs, and hearing the confusion below concluded not to make their exit that way.

They turned around and dashed for the back window, which was merely an open hole, bereft of sash and glass, if it ever had any.

Each in turn lowered himself out at arm's length, dropped to the ground, and then made off as fast as they could go, leaving Morton and Ferguson to shift for themselves.

Jude, Slatts, and Tom landed all in a heap at the foot of the stairs.

Unfortunately, Tom was the undermost, and the weight of the others, accompanied by an accidental kick in the head from Jude's boot, rendered him unconscious.

Jude and Slatts slowly extricated themselves from their predicament much the worse for their tumble.

Ferguson's nose had come into contact with the corner of the stairs, and it began to bleed badly.

"Oh, my nose!" howled Jude, scrambling to his feet.

"Wow! My neck!" groaned Slatts, following him.

Tom Benedict lay just as he had landed on the floor, silent and motionless.

The two girls were frightened out of their senses by the sudden and unexpected descent of the three boys together, and they did not know what to do except grab and hold on to each other for protection.

Ferguson and Morton glanced down at the senseless Tom, then they noticed the girls in the gloom of the passageway,

and, seized by a fear of the consequences of the trouble that had happened all around, they made a break for the front room, scurrying out of the mill and down the road to Plainville.

"Oh, dear, what does this all mean?" fluttered Eva, terribly unnerved. "Where is Fred?"

"Who is that on the floor at the foot of the stairs?" shivered Edith. "Is he dead?"

"Dead!" screamed Eva. "Oh, it may be Fred!"

"Or Tom! He went up stairs last," cried the thoroughly alarmed Edith, shaking in every limb. "What shall we do, Eva?"

Eva was not braver than the average girl, but she thought as much of Fred as though he were her brother.

The very idea that he might have been thrown down stairs by the rascals who had come tumbling on top of him, and was lying there dying, perhaps dead, nerved her to instant action.

She ran forward, knelt by the boy's side and peered into his face.

"Why, it's Tom," she cried, turning to Edith, with a great feeling of relief that it was not Fred.

"Tom!" shrieked Edith. "Oh, don't say he is dead!" she added, rushing forward, and dropping beside the lad she thought so much of.

"No, he isn't dead; he's breathing," replied Eva.

"But he may be dying," moaned Edith. "Help me carry him out into the air."

"Yes, yes, I will; but what can be keeping Fred up stairs? I'm afraid something has happened to him. I'm going to run up and see."

Under ordinary circumstances Eva never would have dared venture up on that floor, but her anxiety about Fred banished every other consideration from her mind.

She sprang up the stairs like a fawn and stepped out on the deserted floor of the room.

Not a sign of the boy was to be seen anywhere.

"Fred! Fred!" she called. "Where are you?"

She received no answer but the dull echo of her own voice.

"Oh, where can he be?" she breathed, in anxious suspense. "There is no one here, and he came up here only a few moments ago."

The open window attracted her notice.

She ran over to it and looked out.

There was not a soul in sight.

She was growing more frightened at the mystery of the thing.

As she walked back she saw the closet, the door of which stood wide open.

In fear and trembling, she cautiously approached it and looked in.

At first she could see nothing clearly, then she observed the jagged hole in the floor.

She did not connect it with Fred's disappearance, and after a final look around the big room she returned down stairs, much bewildered and upset by her inability to find her escort.

"He isn't up stairs. There's no one there at all. I don't know what has become of him," she told Edith.

"Fred not up stairs!" gasped Miss Clark. "Why, he must be. He didn't come down."

"I know he didn't. I can't understand it at all. I looked all over the room, and I am positive he isn't there."

At that moment Tom moved and then sat up, looking around in a confused way.

"Tom, Tom," cried Edith eagerly, "are you hurt?"

"That you, Edith? I didn't know where I was. I don't know whether I'm hurt or not. I feel all sore and bruised, and my head feels as big as a balloon. Hello, Eva; you there? Say, what happened to me, anyway?"

"Don't you remember?" asked Edith. "You were knocked down stairs by a couple of boys, I think."

"One of them looked just like Jude Ferguson, but of course it couldn't have been him, here in Plainville," spoke up Eva suddenly.

"I remember now. We heard a racket up stairs just after Fred went up, and I started up to see what was the matter. Two chaps ran into me, and we all came rolling down in a bunch. Where are they, and where is Fred?"

"They ran away," said Eva. "And Fred, we don't know where he is."

"Don't know where he is?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment. "He's up stairs, of course, if he didn't come down."

"No, he isn't," replied Eva, in a positive tone. "I was just up there looking for him, and there isn't anybody up stairs."

"That's funny," answered Tom. "There's no other way to get down that I know of except those stairs."

He stood up and felt of himself.

"I guess there are no bones broken. I'm only lame and sore from the tumble," he said. "I'll go up myself and take a look."

At that juncture there were sounds of steps in the next room.

An instant later two men, rather rough in appearance, darkened the doorway into the passage.

The moment they saw Tom and the two girls they stopped with a startled imprecation.

CHAPTER VI.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

"Well," growled the foremost man, "what are you people doing here?"

Tom looked at the fellow.

So did the girls, and they drew closer to Benedict, for they didn't like the looks of the intruders.

Just then there was a heavy rumbling in the air which presaged the approach of a thunder storm.

The sun had vanished behind a dark bank of clouds which covered half of the heavens, and the brightness of the early afternoon had gone out of the face of nature.

Under these conditions the passage between the two rooms was much darker than it had been, though neither Tom nor the girls had noticed the difference.

Thinking it well not to provoke trouble, Tom told the men that they had come there to look at the mill.

"Well, if you've seen all you want of it, you'd better go," was the surly reply.

"We're going as soon as a friend of mine comes down stairs," answered Benedict.

"What's he doing up there?" asked the man suspiciously.

"I don't know what he's doing. He went up to look around. I'll see if I can find him."

"Don't leave us down here with these men," whispered Edith, who also expressed Eva's sentiments on the subject.

"Come up with me, then," said Tom, starting to ascend to the floor above.

The men didn't move, but watched the girls follow Benedict up the stairs.

As soon as the three had disappeared through the opening the fellows talked together in a low tone.

Tom called "Fred" several times, and, receiving no reply, walked to the closet and looked into it.

The room was so dark now that he didn't notice the hole in the floor, and might have walked into it and got a nasty tumble like Fred had experienced but that Eva caught him by the jacket and warned him of the danger.

He fumbled in his pocket for a match, but he didn't have one; so all he could do was to examine the closet in the dark with great caution.

As the place was quite bare he was soon satisfied that his chum wasn't in there.

"It's funny where Fred has gone," he said. "Could it be possible that he fell into that hole?" he added, as the awful possibility occurred to his mind.

Eva gave a gasp, and her heart nearly stopped beating.

She had not thought of such a thing when she noticed the hole herself.

Now that hole seemed to furnish the solution of the mystery surrounding Fred's unaccountable disappearance.

If he had fallen down there, how far had he gone?

"Call down and see if he's there," said Eva to Benedict in an agitated tone.

Tom shouted his chum's name repeatedly, but without result.

"He isn't down there," he said, "or——"

He was interrupted by the voice of the man who had addressed him below.

This fellow now stood at the head of the stairs, with his head and shoulders above the floor.

"What's keeping you folks so long up here?" he said irritably. "Where's that friend of yours?"

Tom's reply was drowned by a heavy crash of thunder almost overhead.

The two girls gave a jump and uttered stifled screams.

Almost immediately the wind and rain swooped down on the old mill, and the air grew so dark that the young people could barely see one another.

"I didn't hear what you said," called the man on the stairs.

"I said that I don't know where my friend has got to," replied Tom.

"Oh, you don't," sneered the man. "What kind of steer are you giving me?"

"None at all. I'm telling you the truth."

"If your friend came up here, and didn't go down again, you ought to have found him long before this. I'd like to know what kind of game you're up to, anyway."

"We're up to no game. In any case," added Tom, losing his patience, "I don't see why you're so interested in us."

"Look here, young fellow, I don't intend to take any sass from you. Just come down stairs, where we can

keep track of you, or there'll be something doing you won't like."

The fellow spoke in a tone that showed he meant business, and Tom, having the two girls to protect, decided that the easiest way to avoid trouble was to obey, for he couldn't hope to cope against the two men if they came at him.

"Come, let's go down," he said to Eva and Edith. "It won't do to rile these men. They can make it very unpleasant for us if they should take a notion to do so."

So Tom assisted the girls down stairs, and the three went into the front room, where they watched the progress of the thunder storm and kept a wary eye out for the two men, who, however, remained out of sight in the passage.

Eva was terribly distressed about Fred.

She pictured to herself that the boy was lying unconscious or dead somewhere in the hole under the closet, and she clung to Edith and cried bitterly.

Tom and Miss Clark both tried to comfort her, but she was inconsolable.

So the minutes passed and the storm continued outside.

It was an uncommonly heavy one.

The thunder crashed with fearful detonations and the lightning lit up the darkened landscape with startling intensity.

It was a trying situation all around for the young people, but there was nothing to do but grin and bear it.

What were they to do when the storm had passed?

How could they leave the mill without Fred?

They had not the slightest intention of deserting him, and yet it seemed evident that the men wished the mill to themselves for some reason.

Who were these men, anyway?

They were not tramps, but they might easily be something worse.

What was to be the end of this adventure?

At length, after what seemed to be an endless time, the thunder storm passed away, and the sun came out again.

"What shall we do about Fred?" asked Eva.

"Blessed if I know," replied Tom, scratching his head in a perplexed way.

"Come now, are you people going, or do you expect to camp here for the rest of the day?" asked the fellow who had done all the talking, poking his head into the room.

"Come outside," said Tom to the girls, paying no attention to the man.

"What do you suppose those men want about the mill?" asked Edith, after they had got into the sunshine.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they are a couple of crooks who are hanging out there for no good purpose," replied Tom. "I think the best and only thing we can do under the circumstances will be to hurry in to town and call at the police office. We'll tell the story of Fred's disappearance, and call their attention to the presence of these two fellows here. Then I could come back with an officer and make a systematic search for Fred."

The girls agreed that this would be the best plan to follow, though Eva hated to leave the mill, believing that Fred had fallen through the hole in the closet, and might be dead or dying somewhere inside the building.

"As the case stands," said Tom, "we can't do anything

ourselves to help him, even if he did fall through that hole. Therefore, the sooner we call in outside assistance the better it may be for him."

Eva, convinced that Tom was right, offered no further objection to going back to town, and so the three set off as fast as they could walk.

The two men in the mill watched them until they were nearly out of sight; then they entered the small rear room, one of them lifted the trap in the floor, and they disappeared down a flight of steps into the cellar, pulling the trap down after them.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CELLAR OF THE OLD MILL.

When the floor of the closet gave way without the least warning under Fred, he went down into the dark depths like a shot.

Although he wasn't over two seconds falling clean through to the cellar, it seemed to his startled fancy as if he had dropped a mile.

He landed on top of an old mildewed straw mattress, which broke his fall, but the shock was sufficient to deprive him of consciousness.

He lay there insensible all through the thunderstorm, and began to recover his scattered faculties as it passed away.

When he came to he had no idea where he was, nor, at first, what had happened to him.

He was surrounded by dense darkness, and he began to wonder what it all meant.

Then his thoughts began to shape themselves, and he recollected having been attacked by several persons, who seemed to be boys, and in the midst of the mix-up the floor of the closet had given way and he had been precipitated downward.

That was the extent of his knowledge.

He believed he had only been senseless a few moments, and sat up to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

"Where the dickens am I?" he breathed. "It's a wonder that I didn't break my neck, for I must have fallen some distance. I don't seem to feel any the worse for it, though. Feels like a mattress I'm on. That must have saved me. It's lucky for me that I hit it so neatly. If I'd struck the hard ground, I probably would have broken half my bones. I wonder who those rascals were who assaulted me? They were hiding in the closet. The first idea I had of trouble was being jerked right into the closet, thrown down, and a shower of fists descending on my back and head like huge hailstones. Then the floor gave way, and the last thing I remember was the shock of fetching up down here. This is an adventure I didn't count on when we came out to look at the old mill. Well, I must see if I can escape from this place and get back to Tom and the girls."

Fred felt in his pocket for his match-safe, which he always carried, struck a lucifer and looked around.

He found himself at the bottom of a kind of shaft, with a large hole opening out into what he surmised to be the cellar of the mill.

The hole, however, was barricaded by several dilapidated barrels full of rubbish.

Fred saw that he would be obliged to upset one of them to get out.

Striking another match to see which barrel he had better tackle for that purpose, he saw what appeared to be a good-sized valise crowded in among them.

Grabbing hold of it, he yanked it out, and found it very heavy.

Wondering what was in it, he lit a third match and looked it over.

On one side, in small black letters, he saw distinctly "Abel Ashfield."

He gazed at the name with fascinated eyes, for it was that of the old miser who had been murdered and robbed some time between Friday night and Saturday morning.

This evidently had belonged to him, and the thought instantly occurred to Fred that, from its weight and bulkiness, it contained the plunder taken from the old man's house by the scoundrels who had committed the crime.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed, as the match expired in his fingers, "this is a discovery for fair. The man or men who hid this can't be a great way off. Could it be that it was they who were hidden in the closet and attacked me when I came upon them accidentally? It must be so. Who else would have been trying to keep under cover up there? They are likely to come down here soon to see what has become of me. I don't fancy the idea of going up against such scoundrels, especially in this place, where they could easily do me up. I must make a move quick and try to outwit them."

Fred put down the dead man's valise, and, applying all his strength to the first barrel he laid his hands on, toppled it over.

Snatching up the valise, he stepped out of the hole over the wrecked barrel.

Striking another match, he looked around the cellar for some means of making his exit from the place.

He saw the stairs leading to the trap and walked over to them.

As he put his foot on the lowest stair he heard the sounds of heavy footsteps on the naked boards above.

"Goodness! That may be them now. I must hide."

He slipped under the stairway, and a moment later the steps ceased and the trap was raised, letting down a dim light.

Two men came down.

"Close the trap, Bill," said the first.

"You don't s'pose I'd let it stay open, do you?" growled the other.

The speaker pulled the trap after him, and Fred could hear the two men breathing in the dark within a few feet of him.

"Get out your pocket lantern, Bill," said the first man, as he shuffled forward. "We'll open the valise, divide the stuff, and make off by different routes. We can meet at Barney Dolan's, in Chicago."

"We're takin' chances showin' ourselves in daylight, Harker."

Fred caught his breath on hearing the name.

This must be the dead man's scapegrace nephew, Jim Harker.

He was either the murderer or the murderer's accom-

plise, it mattered little which, for his uncle's blood was on his hands just the same.

"We can't help it," replied Harker. "That chap with the two girls is more than likely to report our presence in this mill. He acted deuced suspicious to me, giving us that cock-and-bull story about a friend of his being in the upper story when there wasn't any one there. We had all we could do to get rid of them."

"They seemed to have some object hangin' around the place," replied the man Bill. "They didn't want to go."

"That's what makes me skittish about staying here any longer. It's my opinion we'll be safer out in the open, and that we can't make a move any too quick."

The conversation of the rascals rather mystified Fred.

Clearly it had not been them who attacked him in the closet.

Then who were his assailants, and why were they hiding in the closet?

He recalled the fact that during the brief mix-up his impression was that his attackers were boys.

He now felt pretty certain that he had not been mistaken.

Why several boys should have been hiding in the closet, and why they should have assaulted him the way they did, was a mystery that was beyond his comprehension.

"We'll have to make two bundles apiece of the swag," said Bill. "Then we had better hide in the woods till it gets dark."

"We can do that. Bring your lantern this way. One of these barrels has fallen over. I don't see how that could have happened. They were all right when we left here to get something to eat in town."

"I hope there hain't been any one here nosin' around while we were away," said Bill, in an anxious tone.

"I don't see what should bring any one down into this cellar," replied Harker.

"Nor me. It ain't a place people are likely to go snoopin' in."

Fred saw the speaker flash his pocket lantern about the barrels and then heard Harker utter a fierce imprecation.

"The valise isn't here. It's gone," he said.

"Gone!" gasped Bill.

"Yes, gone," replied Harker, with more hard language.

"It might have fallen behind the barrels."

He bent across the barrel Fred had overturned and directed the rays of the bull's eye all around.

"It isn't there," said Harker.

"Then it may be buried under this rubbish," suggested Bill.

"Give me the lantern a moment," said Harker.

His companion handed it to him.

"Look at this overturned barrel, will you," continued Harker. "Do you mean to tell me that could have turned over of itself? You can see it was full of rubbish and dirt. Somebody has been here, and they've taken the valise."

Bill was staggered by his associate's words, and then he began pulling away the dirt from around the barrel.

Finding no sign of the valise, he lifted up the barrel to its former position and looked again.

Then he began to make use of language that wouldn't look well in print.

"I'll bet we've been taken in by that young chap with the girls," he roared. "He had another fellow with him, just as he claimed, but instead of bein' up stairs the fellow was in the cellar. He was down here rummagin' around when we came on the other rooster with the two girls. What were they doin' in the passage if they wasn't keepin' watch? And they didn't want to make a move, neither, when you spoke to them. As soon as they seen we meant to stay the chap fools us with his yarn about his friend bein' up stairs. Then they went up stairs to find him. We heard him callin' to the other fellow a number of times. I'll bet that was a signal of some kind. Then look how long they stayed up there, until you had to go up and rout 'em down. It's plain enough now that the fellow in the cellar found the valise and sneaked with it while we were watchin' the others."

"How could he get out of this place and we standing in the passage all the time?" asked Harker. "There isn't any outlet in the rear."

"He must have got away, unless he's here yet."

As Bill uttered the last words, Fred suddenly realized the danger of his position.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRED COMES IN FOR A THOUSAND DOLLARS.

Harker, as if impressed by his companion's words, began to flash the light about the cellar.

"I'm afraid I'm in for it," thought Fred uneasily.

Fortunately for him, they started their investigations at the other end of the place, and Fred decided to make an effort to escape while they were so employed.

He came out from the shelter of the stairway, softly mounted the steps, pushed up the trap, placed the valise on the floor, and then followed, closing the trap as softly as he could.

His exit was not observed.

Taking up the valise, he made his way out of the building on his tiptoes, and then clasping his heavy burden in his arms started down the road toward town as fast as he could go.

He saw that it had been raining heavily recently, and from the position of the sun noted the fact that two or three hours had elapsed since the time he, Tom, and the girls had come to the mill.

"I must have been unconscious in the cellar for some time after all," he mused, as he hurried along. "I wonder where the folks are? They were evidently driven away from the mill by those two rascals. They must be expecting me to join them somewhere along the trolley line. Well, I've got to go to the police station first, turn in this valise, and put the officers on to those chaps, who, without doubt, are the murderers of Abel Ashfield. The crime has done them no good, for I've got their plunder away from them. I s'pose my name will be in the papers now. I can't say that I'm stuck on that. But I'm mighty glad I euchered those scoundrels. I can tell who one of the murderers is, anyhow, and I'll be able to identify both if they are caught. There's one thing I'd like to know, and that is who the boys were that were in the closet. They were not there for any good purpose, that's certain."

Just then Fred sighted two persons coming up the street at a rapid gait.

When they got closer Fred, with great satisfaction, recognized his friend Tom.

The other was a policeman.

Fred waved his hand and set the valise down, for he was winded.

Tom gave a shout, pointed him out to the officer, and they hurried up.

"My goodness! I'm mighty glad to see you, Fred," cried Tom. "We've been worried to death about you. We couldn't understand what had happened to you after you went up stairs in the mill. You disappeared as if you had vanished into the air. We found a hole in the floor of the closet, and were afraid you had fallen through it and were perhaps badly hurt."

"I did fall through it, right to the cellar."

"You don't look as if you were hurt much," said Tom in surprise.

"I wasn't hurt at all, though I was knocked insensible. I lighted on an old mattress which was at the bottom of the shaft."

"Gee! You were lucky. Eva will be pleased to death to find that nothing has happened to you. She's been so worried about you that we didn't know what to do with her."

"Is that so?" asked Fred, rather delighted that he was an object of so much interest to the girl whom he thought a whole lot of.

"Say, where did you get that valise?" asked Fred.

"I found it in the mill cellar. By the way, officer, you heard about the murder of Abel Ashfield, haven't you?"

"I should say I have. Half our force are out hunting the neighborhood for some trace of the murderers."

"Well, there are two of them, and they were in the cellar of the old mill about fifteen minutes ago."

"What!" exclaimed the policeman, with an incredulous look.

"I'm giving you straight goods," replied Fred. "Here's the proof of it. This valise belonged to Abel Ashfield—there's his name on it—and I guess from its weight that it contains the stolen property from the old man's safe." The officer was astonished.

He saw right away that Fred was giving him the exact facts of the case.

He took up the valise and admitted that it was heavy enough to contain a lot of valuable plunder.

"How did you get possession of this?"

"It's too long a story to tell you now if you expect to go after the rascals who killed Abel Ashfield."

"You say there are two of them?"

"Yes, and one is Jim Harker, the old man's nephew."

"Say, Fred," exclaimed Tom suddenly, "I'll bet those were the chaps that made the girls and me leave the mill."

"Those were the ones," replied Fred.

"If the girls had suspected that at the time they'd have had a fit. They'd have run right out into the storm."

"What storm? What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? Why, there was a big thunder storm an hour or more ago. Didn't you hear the thunder?"

"Not a bit. I must have been unconscious all through it."

"Well, it was a corker. The girls were almost frightened to death. It shook the mill from roof to cellar."

"I didn't know a thing about it. I noticed, however, that it had been raining."

"Raining! Well, I should say. It simply poured down for about half an hour. I thought it never would let up. When it was over those rascals chased us out of the mill, and we came on to town to notify the police about your mysterious disappearance, and to get assistance to search the building through for you."

"Where are the girls?"

"At the police station."

"Well, officer," asked Fred, "are you going to the mill after those murderers?"

"As there are two of them, and I dare say they'll put up a desperate resistance, I don't think I'd better go alone. We'll return to the station, and you can tell your story to the captain."

"But the villains will get away in the meantime," replied Fred.

"We'll have to chance that. Come on. I'll carry the valise."

So they started off for the police station.

When Fred entered the station, accompanied by Tom and the officer, Eva fairly ran into his arms, she was so delighted to see him looking as usual.

"Oh, Fred, where did you go? Do tell me."

"I went on an exploring expedition," he grinned.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I took an unexpected drop into the cellar."

"Then you did fall through that hole in the closet?"

"I guess that's about the size of it, Eva, though the hole wasn't there when I was yanked into the place."

"It wasn't there? And what do you mean by saying that you were yanked into the closet?" she asked in a puzzled way.

"Come, young man," said the officer, who had placed the valise on the presiding officer's desk, "step up and tell the captain your story."

Accordingly, Fred stepped up and, with his friends around him and the policeman standing near by, he related all that happened to him from the moment he left Tom and the girls on the first floor of the mill and went to the second story on a tour of investigation.

The captain complimented him on his nerve in stealing out of the cellar at the critical moment with the valise in his hand, and assured him that his conduct would be favorably reported to the Leesburg authorities.

The four young people then left the police station to get their belated dinner, after which they took a car for home.

The morning papers had the full story of Fred's adventure in the old mill at Plainville which resulted in the recovery by him of the stolen property taken by the murderers of Abel Ashfield.

The valise contained \$20,000 in money, \$10,000 worth of diamonds, and other precious stones, several mortgage papers, and Abel Ashfield's will, made out in favor of his brother's son, George Ashfield, and cutting off James Harker with one dollar.

Harker and his companion Bill were not captured by the Plainville police when they subsequently searched the mill and the woods in that direction.

The rascals had taken time by the forelock and made their escape.

As soon as George Ashfield heard of the murder of his uncle he came to Leesburg and made arrangements for the funeral.

He did this out of respect to his father's brother, and without any idea that he would be any great gainer by it.

The discovery of the old miser's will, however, among the recovered property made a whole lot of difference to him.

He immediately took charge of the estate as the acknowledged heir, and almost the first thing he did was to present Fred Towne with \$1,000 as an evidence of his appreciation of what he owed the boy, for had not Fred recovered the valise the will, as well as the property, would have been lost to him, and he would only have been entitled to a half interest in his uncle's house.

Fred put the money in a savings bank, and when he showed the book to Eva he said:

"My luck, you see, started with that dollar I won racing with the Pacific Express. It was only a dollar, but it's netted me so far \$1,050."

"Do you expect it to put any more in your way?" asked Eva, laughing.

"Do I? I wouldn't be surprised if it made me a millionaire one of these days."

CHAPTER IX.

FRED IS PROMOTED AND JUDE HEARS SOMETHING HE DOESN'T LIKE.

Jude Ferguson and Slatts Morton, who was a Gordon press feeder, were much surprised to see Fred Towne walk into the office on Monday morning same as usual.

They had not expected to see him turn up for a week, if he ever did again, for they had figured that the fall he got would knock him out badly.

Neither had read the morning paper containing the story of the recovery, through Fred, of the dead miser's property, and they did not learn about the matter until a pressman spoke about it in Morton's hearing, and he immediately beckoned Jude over to his press and told him.

Ferguson wouldn't believe it at first, but he found on investigation that the story was true.

"Instead of injuring Towne," he said to Morton later on, "it looks to me that we put him in the way of doin' a big thing and gettin' his name in the papers. It makes me sick to think of the luck that fellow has had lately. First he wins that dollar, of which I ought to have had half, and now he has made a sort of hero of himself. Some people get everything in this world," added Jude, with a look of disgust, "while others get nothin'. It's a bum world."

"What you goin' to do about it?" asked Morton.

"Oh, I'll reach him yet. The gang will help me out."

"Chase yourself, now. The foreman has his eye on us."

Jude walked away and Morton kept on feeding the press he was at, which hadn't stopped for a moment during the brief conversation.

Fred was the talk of the printing office that morning.

The compositors shook hands with him and congratulated him upon what he had done.

"The Plainville police never would have recovered that stolen property," said one of the compositors when Fred went into his alley for a line of type to complete a job he was helping another printer on. "Those chaps would have got away with it, just as they've got away themselves."

"That may be," admitted Fred; "but after all it was just pure luck that put me in the way of the valise. If I hadn't fallen down that shaft, I never would have known it was there."

"That's all right; but look at the nerve you showed in walking off with it right under the noses of the rascals. That's what counts. You ought to get a good reward for saving \$30,000 worth of money and valuables."

"I wouldn't refuse it if it came my way," grinned the boy.

"I should say not."

Fred having set the line he was after, left the alley.

That morning Gregg called Fred to his desk and surprised him by saying that he was going to get another errand boy, and that hereafter he meant to keep him at the case.

"After this week your wages will be six dollars," added the foreman.

"Thank you, sir," replied Fred, delighted at his advancement.

The reason of his promotion was because Gregg was satisfied that Towne could do as well as a certain \$12 hand he had, and as Mr. Koop was always at him about running the office as economically as possible, he had decided to discharge the man and save \$6 on the weekly payroll.

He would have liked to have got rid of his brother-in-law, too, for in his opinion Jude didn't earn his wages, but he didn't care to raise a ruction in his domestic circle by letting him go.

As soon as the compositors heard about Fred's raise they renewed their congratulations and expressed their satisfaction.

Before the week was out he received the \$1,000 from George Ashfield alluded to in the previous chapter, but he didn't mention this piece of good luck to any one but Tom Benedict, under promise of secrecy, and the Valentines.

Fred and Eva were drawn more than ever together by the adventure at the mill.

The girl had given such strong evidences of her regard for him that the boy was more attentive to her than ever, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Valentine, who, now that Fred was worth \$1,000, had been promoted in his business, and was undeniably smart and a nice boy, began to figure on her young boarder as an excellent proposition for her daughter in the future.

When Jude discovered that Fred had been raised both in position and wages he was wild with rage.

He made a kick to Gregg but got no satisfaction.

"I don't know what you see in that Towne," he growled to his brother-in-law at the supper table that night. "You've made him as good as me, and I've been a year longer in the business than he. You ought to give me a couple of more dollars."

"I would if you were worth it, but you ain't," replied Gregg frankly.

"I don't see why I ain't worth more'n Towne," answered Jude discontentedly.

"There are a lot of things you don't see," replied the foreman, impatiently. "You give me more trouble in a week than Towne does in a year."

"Is that so?" sneered Jude. "I thought you didn't like him."

"I don't like him much, but I'm not running the office on my likes or dislikes. It's up to me to make the best showing I can, and Towne is a mighty smart young printer. I wish you were half as satisfactory, if you want to know my opinion. It is only the fact that you're my brother-in-law that enables you to hold your job. And that won't avail you if Koop ever gets on to you, let me tell you that. He's got sharp eyes, the old man has, and I've seen him watching you more than once lately. He spoke to me about your time slips this morning, so you'd better look out. He'll be sure to compare your work with Towne's now that he's steady on the case, and if he takes a notion that you'll have to go, I won't be able to keep you."

Jude was rather startled by this plain statement of facts.

"Well, you kin fix my time slips, can't you?" he asked, rather humbly.

"The only thing I can do is to give you the easy jobs, but even then if you don't hustle more than you've been doing you'll get into trouble. You waste too much time around the office. When you get a job to set you're always hunting for the type. Can't you remember where the cases are?"

"You ought to give me more straight matter to set. I kin do better on that."

"I guess I'll have to keep you on straight matter altogether after this. I've been trying to make a printer out of you. I've given you every chance to get ahead. It doesn't seem to do any good. Now, Towne hasn't had half the show you've had, and he's doing first class. He can set most any kind of a reprint job. When I have sent him to help any of the men, he's always given satisfaction. On the other hand, the comps always have a kick coming over you. Either you delay the job by your slowness, or you have to set a line over two or three times before it will answer. Now I'll give you fair warning, that unless you do better right away, Towne is going to show you up by his work. Then Koop will want to know why I'm keeping you. You had better understand right now that I'm not going to hurt my chances on your account. You'll never have a better opportunity to get ahead than you're having now under me, and if you ain't a fool altogether you'll sit up and take notice."

With those words Gregg finished his supper and left the table.

This wasn't the first nor the second time that he had pulled Jude over the coals for one thing or another at the office, but it was the first time he had intimated that Ferguson's hold on his job was so insecure.

Jude was disgusted at his brother-in-law's attitude toward him, and set up a kick with his sister, who had always stood his friend.

Mrs. Gregg, however, was beginning to wake up to the

fact that her brother wasn't the ill-used person he had so long represented himself to be.

She had been accustomed to take issue with her husband over Jude and stand up for him, reason or no reason; but at their last run-in on the tiresome subject, Mr. Gregg had got mad and said such plain truths about Jude that Mrs. Gregg weakened.

"Well, why don't you attend to business?" replied his sister sharply. "Jim says you aren't worth your salt in the office."

"He said that, did he?" snarled Jude.

"He did. Now, after what he just said to you at the table, it looks to me as if you don't seem to care whether you get ahead or not. I can't be fighting with Jim all the time on your account. I've something else to do."

She got up and began to clear off the table.

Jude was mad clear through.

He counted on his sister, and now it looked as if she, too, was going back on him.

Being naturally ignorant of the ins and outs of the printing business, she was unable to see through her brother's fake excuses, and thus he had been able to work on her sympathy; but it looked now as if he had reached the limit of his pull.

Jude said something under his breath that his sister wouldn't have been pleased to have heard, and snatching up his hat went out to hunt up some of his gang.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH JUDE AND HIS FRIEND SLATTS GET IT IN THE NECK.

Jude knew in his heart that Fred would make him look like thirty cents in the comparison of their work.

For that reason, if for no other, he hated Towne worse than ever.

He was sore on his brother-in-law for promoting Towne, and thus putting him in a position to show him (Jude) up.

Instead of resolving to apply himself with more diligence to acquiring an insight into the trade, he devoted his thoughts to scheming against Fred.

"If I could only get him out of the office somehow, I'd be all right," he mused. "There isn't any use of me expectin' Jim to fire him, for he won't. I must get around it some other way. Slatts will help me, for he doesn't like Towne no more'n me. I'll go around to Slatt's house and talk the matter over with him."

He met Morton coming out of the very humble dwelling where he lived.

"Where you bound, Slatts?" he asked.

"Where do you s'pose?" replied Morton. "I'm bound for the club-house."

"I'm with you," said Jude.

The club-house in question was the rendezvous of the "Night Hawks," on the outskirts of the town, about half a mile away.

On the way Jude enlarged upon his grievance against Towne, and said he was anxious to find some way to get Fred away from the office for good.

"I don't know how you're goin' to do it if your brother-in-law won't fire him," said Morton.

"I've got to do somethin' or first thing I know I'll get bounced myself."

"How will you?" asked Morton in surprise.

Thereupon Jude told him what Gregg said at the supper table.

Morton was smart enough to see the point.

He was aware that his companion was no great shakes of a printer.

He also knew that Towne was uncommonly clever at the business, for he had heard the men say so a score of times.

Under these circumstances Jude's lack of ability was bound to attract the attention of Mr. Koop, who was always snooping around the composing and press rooms when he was in the office.

As a matter of fact, the proprietor had observed Ferguson's methods already, and had called his foreman's attention to the fact, but Gregg had covered up Jude's delinquencies in order to save him.

Mr. Koop had also noticed Fred's activity and constant diligence, and had likewise pointed the boy out to Gregg as one deserving of encouragement.

Consequently, when the foreman proposed to advance the boy to the case and raise him to \$6, the proprietor nodded approvingly.

"You'd better put up a better bluff than you've been doin'," said Morton. "If you don't, I think I see your finish. There's no gettin' away from the fact that Towne can set type all around you."

"Yah!" snarled Jude. "I thought you was a friend of mine?"

"So I am, but I can't go behind what everybody knows in the office. You know blamed well that you couldn't set a decent-lookin' job to save your life. Look at that card you put together this mornin'."

"What about it?" snorted Ferguson.

"Why, the reader almost had a fit when he saw the proof."

"How do you know he did?"

"I was standin' at his desk waitin' for him to revise a press-proof of a bill-head I had on my jobber. He looked at your job, then at your name, and then he showed it to his copy-holder. Egan looked at it and said, 'Rotten!' 'I'll have to show this to Gregg,' said the reader; 'he'll never stand for that.' Gregg must have turned it over to somebody else to reset, for it was put on my press afterward to work off, and it looked as different as daylight and darkness from the way you had it."

Jude didn't make any reply, and soon afterward the two boys reached the old rookery that was used as a meeting-place by the "Night Hawks," and went up stairs.

If any plot was hatched against Fred that night, nothing came of it.

Three weeks passed away and Towne made a fine showing at the work he was put at.

He wasn't kept altogether at the case, but helped on the stone as well.

The chief stone-hand liked the boy very much, and whenever he had the chance he instructed Fred in his special line.

He showed him how to lay out the various forms they were engaged on, explained the relative distances between

the head, foot and sides of pages, and showed him how to gauge their position by a folded sheet of paper on which the form was to be printed.

When Fred wasn't working at the case, or on the large stones, he was sometimes put at locking up small forms for the job presses.

One day one of his forms went to Morton who, knowing he had locked it up, tried to get him in trouble by loosening the quoins a little so that the rollers pulled the type up and the spaces with it.

Then he complained to the foreman of the small presses who, as he expected, told him to take the form back to the stone and have it fixed.

Morton knew that Gregg never liked to see a form brought back to be fixed up, so he halloed out to Fred:

"Say, why don't you lock your forms up right? This one is all loose. Everythin' is workin' up."

Gregg heard him and walked over to look at it.

Of course, he didn't expect Fred to be perfect yet, but this form looked as if a jar would send it into pi.

"See here, Towne," he said angrily, "what do you mean by sending a form to press in that shape? Don't you know any better?"

Fred came over and examined it.

"I didn't send it that way. I tried it before I carried it over to the press-room, and it was as tight as a drum."

"Oh, it was," sneered Gregg. "Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Somebody must have monkeyed with it," replied Fred, stoutly. "I try to do all my work right."

"Do you mean to say that I monkeyed with it?" demanded Morton.

"Are you willing to swear that is the way you got it from me?"

"Yes, I am."

"You saw that it was loose when I handed it to you?"

"No. I didn't notice nothin' wrong till the rollers pulled the type out."

One of the compositors came up at that moment.

"That isn't Towne's fault," he said to the foreman. "I saw Morton loosen up the quoins before he put the chase on the press, and I wondered why he did it."

Gregg, who didn't like Morton, demanded to know if he had touched the quoins.

Slatts, however, seeing he was in a hole, began to lie out of it.

The foreman didn't believe him.

This was the first form locked up by Fred that there had been any complaint about, and that fact was much in his favor.

"Don't let me catch you at such a trick again, Morton," said Gregg pointedly. "Fix it up," he added, turning to Fred and then walking away.

Fred planed the type down, and took up the quoin key to tighten the patent iron wedges.

"I'm on to you, Morton," he said in a low tone. "You tried to get me in trouble over this form. You know there was nothing the matter with it when I gave it to you. If you get funny again, I'll make you sorry for it."

"Yes, you will," sneered Slatts, with a malevolent look. "I s'pose you think you know it all since you've been pro-

moted. Been tryin' to show Ferguson up, too. Well, maybe your finish will come all right."

Fred made no reply, but tightened the form, tried it, and handed it to Morton, who went back to the press with it.

"What was the trouble with the form?" asked Tom Benedict, when Fred went into his alley, stick in hand, to set a line of type.

Fred told him, and then added that he guessed it was a put-up job.

"I'll bet it was," answered Tom. "You want to keep your eyes skinned for both Slatts and Jude. They'll try to do you if they can."

"They'd better not let me catch them at any funny business," said Fred. "I'd go for their scalps quicker than winking."

"That's right. If you need any help, I'll polish one of them off myself."

"You needn't hunt for trouble on my account, Tom. I can look out for myself."

That afternoon Gregg went off at two o'clock to attend a funeral, and one of the compositors was instructed to give work out and look after things.

Mr. Koop, knowing that his foreman was away, made it his business to keep his eye on the composing room.

On one of his snooping tours he caught Jude and Slatts Morton chinning behind one of the frames.

He didn't say anything to them, and they were not aware that he had detected them.

Next morning he called Gregg into his office, told him what he'd seen, and ordered him to discharge both of the boys that afternoon, which was Saturday.

Accordingly, when he handed Morton his pay envelope, Gregg told him that his services were dispensed with.

Morton believed he was discharged on account of the trouble about Fred's form, and he privately vowed to get square with the young printer.

Five minutes later Jude was informed that he was bounced.

He put up a big howl to his brother-in-law, but the latter cut him short.

"I told you what you might expect if you didn't do better," said Gregg. "Mr. Koop has ordered your discharge and it is impossible for me to keep you."

Then Gregg told him how the boss had caught him and Morton loafing behind a frame, and that had settled their fate.

Jude walked out of the office, looking very black.

He joined Slatts and they went off together vowing vengeance against the whole establishment, from the proprietor down.

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG INCENDIARIES.

On Saturday nights Fred and Tom were accustomed to go to a gymnasium and practice athletic exercises for the benefit of their health and to enlarge their muscles.

After Fred had eaten his supper he went to Benedict's house to meet him as usual.

Tom was waiting for him, and they started for the gymnasium in good spirits.

"Well," said Tom as they walked along, "I'm mighty

glad that Jude and Slatts have been fired from the office. If anybody ever deserved to be bounced it was Jude, but I never thought he'd get it as long as his brother-in-law was foreman of the office."

"Gregg didn't bounce him of his own accord," replied Fred. "It was the boss's orders."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Mr. Koop caught him and Morton yesterday afternoon chinning behind Benson's frame. I saw the old man standing behind the cutting-machine looking at something very attentively. I wondered what it was that interested him and watched him out of the corner of my eye. After a time he walked away, and by and by I saw Jude and Morton come out from behind the frame. Then I guessed that Mr. Koop had been watching them, and I was satisfied they'd hear from him on the subject, though I didn't think they'd be discharged for it."

"Well, I'm not surprised that Jude got it in the neck at last for sojering. He could put in more time doing nothing than any other chap I ever met."

"That's right. I've often wondered how he managed to square himself on his time slips. I guess Gregg must have helped him out."

"He certainly did, or else Jude covered it up with that old bluff 'distribution,' which he could easily work in, seeing he was distributing about half his time."

"I could distribute as much type in half a day as he put away in a week," said Fred, with a laugh. "The men always swore that he kept the job cases in rotten shape. It didn't seem to worry him much if he dropped half a dozen different letters in the same box so long as he got the line of type in the case. I suppose you remember the time he distributed a couple of handfuls of old style agate three-nick into a Roman nonpareil two-nick case. I had to pick it all out before the case could be used, and it was the dickens of a job."

"I remember it, for I wanted to use the case myself at the time and couldn't. Jude wouldn't have lasted a week in any other printing office. I wonder what he'll do now? Slatts can get a job feeding at any of the other offices, if there's a vacancy for a job press feeder, and he can hold his job down if he wants to; but Jude, even if he gets a job, will find it a hard matter to make good."

They had reached the gymnasium by this time, so the subject under discussion was dropped.

The boys usually remained there until it was time for the place to close up, and this occasion was no exception to the rule.

It was half-past ten when they left, and they decided to take a short cut home.

This carried them up past the rear of Koop's printing office.

That part of the town was dark and deserted at night.

The gas lamps were few and far between, and their light did not penetrate far.

Suddenly Tom pointed a short distance ahead.

"I saw two shadows run into the alley at the back of our office," he said.

"I saw them, too. Looks kind of suspicious, doesn't it?" said Fred.

"Yes. I don't see what any one should be doing in there at this time of the night. They might be thieves."

"If they broke into our place, they wouldn't get much. They couldn't steal the presses, and I don't think they'd bother with the type."

"They might break into Koop's safe and get away with any money he had locked up there."

"If they're thieves they're more likely to force their way into one of the other buildings than into ours. You don't often hear of burglars looting a printing office."

"I don't ever remember hearing of such a case. Suppose we steal into the alley and see if we can find out what those chaps are up to. If we think they ain't honest we can look up a policeman and put him onto them."

"All right. I'm with you."

So they entered the alley on tip toes.

It was as dark as the fabled caves of Erebus and they had to grope their way along, using great caution not to stumble over objects that lay about.

The alley ended in a small yard at the back of the printing office.

There was not a sign of the intruders anywhere.

"Where could they have gone to?" asked Tom.

"They must have made their way into one of the buildings."

"Then we'd better try to find an officer pretty quick."

"Wait a moment. Let us see if we can find out which building they've broken into," said Fred.

It didn't take them long to discover that one of the basement windows under the printing office was open.

"They've gone in here," whispered Fred.

"That's what they have. They're burglars as sure as you live. It's up to us to hunt a cop."

"Well, you go and find one. I'll remain here and watch."

"You've got plenty of nerve to do that. They might catch you when they come out."

"I don't believe they will. If you're going, get a move on."

Tom at once moved off down the alley toward the street and was soon swallowed up in the darkness.

There was a small barrel beside the open basement window, and Fred crouched down behind that.

He hadn't been there but a moment or two before he saw a couple of heads appear at the opening.

"There's no one here, Slatts," said the voice of Jude Ferguson. "I told you that you were dreamin'."

"I could have sworn I heard steps in this yard," replied Morton.

"Well, you kin see for yourself that there's no one here, can't you?"

"There don't seem to be. Let's get back and finish the job."

The heads disappeared, leaving Fred greatly astonished at their presence there at that time of the night.

"They're up to some piece of wickedness, I'll bet a hat," breathed Fred. "I'm going to find out what it is. They haven't any right to be here, so late at night especially. I wouldn't be surprised but they're up to some mischief in the printing office. Maybe they mean to pi a lot of our type in revenge for having been discharged. It is like them to do just such a mean trick. Let them try it and they'll see what the inside of a cell in the jail looks like."

With these thoughts in his mind, Fred crept in through

the window and made his way cautiously forward in the gloom.

His intention was to ascend to the printing office, where he expected to find Jude and Morton inside up to some mischief.

He meant to give them both the surprise of their lives, and something in the way of a pounding that they were likely to remember for several days, after which, if they had done any damage, he intended to put the police after them.

Suddenly he heard sounds over in a corner of the cellar under the stairs leading to the first floor.

"That must be them over there," breathed Fred. "What are they up to down here?"

He slipped softly over and heard the two boys talking in low tones.

They were evidently doing something, for he saw the dim glow of a candle which reflected their forms on the dirty wall, and heard the rustling of paper and the occasional splitting sound of wood being torn apart.

"This is where we get hunk on old Koop," chuckled Ferguson.

"Bet your life he'll pay well for bouncin' us," replied Morton.

"We won't be the only ones that'll lose our jobs," said Jude.

"That's right. The whole push will be huntin' other sits Monday."

"Fred Towne among them. Gee! How I hate that feller!"

"He and Tom Benedict will be on their uppers in a week or two, for there ain't jobs enough in town to half go 'round."

"I'd like to see them both starve," was Jude's charitable reply.

"So would I. But no such luck. Now, everythin's ready. Who's goin' to touch her off?"

"You do it. You're nearest the candle."

"Not much. We'll both do it together, then one can't give the other away."

"Ho! Hain't we sworn to secrecy?" snorted Ferguson.

"Sure we are; but I believe in bein' on the safe side always. Come nearer and grab on to the candle. What are you holdin' back for? Are you flunkin' already?"

"I should say not."

"Then don't be so slow. It's after eleven and we want to get home right away, so we won't be suspected of havin' nad a hand in this thing."

"Who'll suspect us?"

"Your brother-in-law might get an idea you were mixed up in it out of revenge for losin' your job."

"Why should he? I'm always out nights with the gang."

"Well, are you ready?" asked Morton impatiently.

"Sure," was the reply.

"Then here goes old Koop's printing office."

"Great Scott!" palpitated Fred, who had heard enough of the conversation to give him a pretty clear idea of what was in the wind. "The rascals are going to set the building afire. I must stop this."

He sprang forward with a bound just as Jude and Slatts applied the candle to the pile of paper and wood they had prepared for their nefarious purpose.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CELLAR.

The paper blazed up, throwing a glare for several yards around.

The instant the young rascals had set it afire they started to leave the spot, only to find themselves confronted by Fred Towne.

They fell back with exclamations of consternation and surprise.

"So this is what you two are doing?" cried Fred, springing on top of the fire and trying to beat it out with his feet. "You're a nice pair of rascals."

Morton was the first to recover his self-possession.

"Slug him, Jude. It's Towne. He'll give us away."

The speaker sprang on Fred and began to punch him.

Ferguson followed his example a moment later.

Fred found himself obliged to turn his attention to defending himself.

He had partially extinguished and scattered the burning pile of wood and paper.

The moment his attention was diverted from it, it took hold afresh and blazed up, soon throwing a bright light around the fighting boys.

Fred had his hands full with the two of them.

They were desperately in earnest in their endeavor to get the best of him, for they knew they were in his power, and this crime was a serious one.

Swat!

Fred's fist took Jude in the eye and he staggered back with a howl.

Biff!

He landed on Morton's jaw with a force that rattled Slatts's teeth.

Both, however, came at him again, and in trying to side-step a blow from Ferguson's fist, Fred tripped over the cellar steps and went down on them.

Jude and Morton jumped on him at once, and, holding him down, tried to pound his face.

Morton was in the only available position to do any effective work, and Fred quickly grabbed him by the wrists and checkmated him.

"Get a stick and hit him on the head," cried Slatts to Ferguson.

Jude reached for a piece of wood and whacked Towne alongside the ear with it.

"Once more," said Morton.

"Do you mean to murder me?" cried Fred, who could not avoid Jude's onslaught.

"Will you swear not to give us away if we let up on you?" replied Slatts.

"No, I won't," answered Fred, suddenly upsetting Morton and rolling over on top of him.

"Hit him, Jude," cried Slatts. "He's got me down. Break his head."

Ferguson brought the stick down on Towne's head.

He tried to escape the blow, but did not wholly succeed.

It stunned him completely for the time being, and the young rascals, believing they had knocked him out, kicked the blazing wood and paper closer together and then, grab-

bing their victim, dragged him across the cellar and out into the yard, where they left him and ran away in the darkness.

They were hardly out of sight before Fred recovered.

He staggered on his feet and his first thoughts was for the fire.

He made his way into the cellar again, though his head was bleeding from a deep gash inflicted by Jude's blow, and, going over to the stairs where the blaze was beginning to assume dangerous proportions, he started in to extinguish it.

It was not an easy proposition he had on his hands.

The smoke half choked him, and he reeled around like a drunken boy.

The fire was getting the best of him in spite of his efforts, when fortunately Tom appeared with an officer.

Not seeing Fred, they looked in at the cellar window and saw the reflection of the growing blaze.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Tom. "The place is on fire."

They lost no time making their entrance and rushed over to where Fred, smoke-begrimed and bleeding, was fighting the fire.

"Why, Fred!" cried Tom.

"Help me put it out," gasped Towne, looking ready to drop.

Tom and the policeman, recognizing the seriousness of the situation, jumped in at once, and after a desperate struggle that lasted fifteen minutes they succeeded in turning the scale and putting out the fire.

As soon as the last of the lighted wood was reduced to a smoking mass, Fred fell against the stairs in a faint.

Tom and the policeman bore him into the yard, and Benedict endeavored to revive him while the officer returned to the cellar to make certain that the fire was wholly out.

Tom dashed some rain water into Fred's face and that brought him to his senses.

"Gee! You look like a wreck, Fred. You've got a cut over your ear and another on the top of your head. How did you get them?"

"Ferguson hit me twice with a piece of wood."

"Ferguson!" exclaimed Tom in astonishment. "Where did you meet him?"

"In the cellar."

"You don't mean it."

"I do. The fellows we took for burglars were Jude and Morton. They started that blaze to burn out the printing office in revenge for their discharge."

"Go on!" cried Tom, almost incredulously.

"It's a fact. They heard us out here, and after you went off they came to the window to look out. I was hiding behind that barrel and they didn't notice me. When they went back I followed them, discovered what they were up to, and jumped in just as they started the blaze. They attacked me like a pair of savages, but I think I should have got the better of them only I fell over the stairs. That put me at a disadvantage, and Jude hit me twice with a stick while Morton held me down. Then they dragged me out here, left me and scooted."

"Well, I never thought those chaps were so bad. They'll be sent to a reformatory for this night's work."

When the policeman joined them, Fred told his story to him.

"This is a mighty serious matter for those young scamps," he said. "You must come with me to the station and tell your story to the officer in charge. He'll send a couple of men out to arrest them."

So Fred and Tom went with the policeman to the police station, about eight blocks away.

Fred repeated his story, which was supplemented by the evidence of Benedict and the officer.

A statement of the case was entered on the blotter, from which it was subsequently copied and enlarged upon by the reporters of the morning dailies, of which Leesburg boasted of three, and duly appeared under appropriate scareheads on the following morning.

Fred and Tom volunteered to pilot the two policemen detailed to arrest Jude and Morton to the homes of the boys.

Before starting off, Fred had his head bandaged up at a neighboring drugstore.

On reaching Gregg's house, one of the officers pounded loudly on the front door.

The family had long since retired, but the racket aroused the foreman of Koop's printery, and he opened an upper window and stuck his head out.

"What's the matter?" he asked in no pleasant tone, rather astonished to see a party of four below.

"Is Jude Ferguson in the house?" asked the officer.

"I don't know. What do you want with him?"

"I want to see him."

"You're a policeman, aren't you?" asked Gregg, beginning to suspect that his wife's brother had got himself into a scrape.

"I am."

"Has Jude been getting himself into trouble?" asked the foreman. "Did you come here to arrest him?"

"I did. Now, don't keep us waiting, but come down and let us in."

Gregg shut down the window, and in a few minutes he opened the front door.

"Jude is not home," he said. "I just looked in his room. You may go up if you insist on doing so."

"You are certain he's not in the house?" said the policeman.

"I am certain he's not in his room or my room. You can look the rest of the house over and convince yourself. He went out after supper and we haven't seen him since."

The two officers looked the house over, Gregg's own sleeping apartment excepted, while Fred and Tom remained in the background.

Jude was not found.

The party then left, but one of the policemen took up his post in the shadow of a building on the opposite side of the way to watch for the young rascal's return.

The rest went on to Morton's home.

Morton's father, a section-hand on the railroad, came to the door and said his son had not come home yet.

Recognizing the policeman, he, too, wanted to know if his boy had got into trouble.

He received no direct satisfaction other than that Slatts was wanted at the station-house.

The second policeman also took up a position to watch

the Morton house, while Fred and Tom, having done all that was expected of them, left him and started for their homes.

"Jude and Slatts are up against it for fair," said Tom.

"They deserve all that's coming to them. If it hadn't been that we fortunately detected them entering the alley, Mr. Koop's printing office would have been burned down before this, and we and the other compositors, not to speak of the employees of the pressroom, would have been out of work."

"Yes, I guess we would," replied Tom. "I wonder if they realized that they were committing a very serious crime?"

"I should judge that they didn't care what they did so long as they got square with Mr. Koop."

"It is evident they drew a line at murder, at any rate, or they wouldn't have dragged you out of the cellar. It's my opinion that the officers won't catch them to-night. Ten chances to one they've left town, knowing that they'd be arrested as soon as you recovered your senses and informed on them."

Fred agreed with him, and soon afterward they parted company at Tom's door.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING ENCOUNTER.

Tom Benedict was right when he said that Ferguson and Morton were not likely to be arrested that night, and that they had fled the town.

Next morning, when their respective families read the paper, they knew why the boys were wanted by the police.

Jude's sister nearly had hysterics over the disgrace that had fallen on her brother, to whose many failings she had for so long shut her eyes.

Gregg, in consideration of his wife's feelings, had little to say on the matter, but he thought a good deal, nevertheless.

He had suspected for some time that Jude was a bad boy, and now he was sure of the fact.

Mr. Koop's first intimation that his property had been in danger was received from the morning paper.

After reading the story carefully, he went to the station house for further particulars, but could get no more light there on the subject, so he called around to see Fred Towne.

Fred had already told a very exciting story of his night's adventure to the Valentines.

Eva had been much alarmed when she saw his head bandaged up after he came down stairs to breakfast.

He assured her that the gash would soon heal, and that it would amount to nothing.

When Mr. Koop called, about ten o'clock, he was invited into the little parlor and Fred was notified of his presence.

"Well, young man," said Mr. Koop, when Fred appeared, "it seems that you saved my printing office last night. I am under great obligations to you, and shall see that you are suitably rewarded."

"Tom Benedict and the police officer deserve as much credit in the matter as I," replied Fred, who was not so selfish as to wish to take more than his share of commendation in the affair.

"Yes, I believe they rendered very valuable aid, but you were on hand all the time, and tried to extinguish the fire at the start, which no doubt you would have done had you not been attacked by the rascals. At any rate, your head gives evidence that you had a strenuous time of it before your companion and the policeman arrived on the scene. Under these circumstances I am of the opinion that I am more indebted to you than to the others. Now, I want you to tell me the whole story. I have only had the newspaper account, and the reporters usually exaggerate the facts."

Fred immediately told all that had taken place from the moment he and Tom left the gymnasium for home until they parted from the second policeman on watch for Morton.

Mr. Koop punctuated the story at intervals with approving nods, and when Fred had finished he once more expressed his thanks to the young printer.

"I have observed your attention to business and general faithfulness to my interests since you came to work for me," he said, which was an unusual acknowledgment on Mr. Koop's part, "and it has been my intention to advance you as fast as you deserved it. Now that you have rendered me such a special service, young man, I consider it my duty to present you with \$100, and to raise your wages."

"Thank you, sir," replied the delighted boy.

"You are getting \$6, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Hereafter your pay shall be \$9 until further notice. I will give you the \$100 to-morrow."

Thus speaking, Mr. Koop rose, put on his hat, and took his leave.

Tickled to death, Fred rushed into the dining-room to tell the Valentines of his good fortune.

"You see it all started with that silver dollar, Eva," he said. "I'm going to keep it as long as I live."

"You ought to have it framed," she answered with a laugh.

"Perhaps I will one of these days. It deserves a gold frame, for so far it's brought me in \$1,150 inside of a couple of months, not speaking of promotion at the office and two increases of wages."

"Do you really believe that dollar is responsible for all that?"

"Sure I do."

Eva smiled incredulously.

In her eyes it was only an ordinary dollar, and she did not credit it with any lucky features.

She believed Fred would have been just as lucky had he not got it.

Next morning Fred was the lion of the composing-room.

There was a bunch of Mr. Koop's employees around the door a few minutes before half-past seven, and when Fred appeared he was surrounded at once.

The men wanted to hear his story from his own lips, for they had all read about the matter in the papers, but Towne excused himself on the ground that the shop would open up in five minutes, and he couldn't possibly narrate the circumstances in that short time.

Ferguson and Morton were generally denounced, and everybody was sure their finish was in sight.

Fred was called into Mr. Koop's office in the course of

the morning and the proprietor handed him five \$20 bills in fulfillment of his promise.

Mr. Koop also raised Tom from \$10 to \$12 a week.

Work was a little slack, anyway, in the composing-room.

Gregg looked to be in a bad humor all the morning, and the men were careful not to attract any unfavorable notice from him.

Two weeks later the Sunday-school Fred, Tom, Eva and Edith Clark attended gave its annual picnic, and the four wanted to attend it badly.

Eva, who worked in a millinery store, found that she would be able to get off for the day, but the other three were not so confident.

However, they agreed to wait on Mr. Gregg two days before the event, which was slated for Saturday, and ask his permission to go off that day.

Accordingly, on Thursday afternoon, just before closing time, Fred, Tom and Edith lined up before the foreman's desk and made their request.

Gregg grinned when he heard what they wanted.

He happened to be in good humor, as everything had gone off to his liking that day; and as there was not an overabundance of work in the office he saw a saving of nearly \$5 on the weekly payroll, so he told them they could go, and they could get their money Friday night.

This was very satisfactory to the young people, so they made their arrangements to attend the picnic.

It was to be held on a wooded island down the river, about ten miles from Leesburg, and a steamer had been engaged to take the Sunday-school scholars and their friends to the island and back.

Fred, with Eva looking her prettiest, and Tom, escorting Edith, who was got up regardless, arrived at the wharf in time to pick out the four best seats in the bow of the steamer, and in due time the boat, well crowded, left her dock and headed down the stream.

"Isn't this just too delightful for anything?" exclaimed Edith, as the musicians began to tune up their instruments near by.

"It's all to the good," replied Fred. "We've escaped a warm day's work in the office, and will have nothing to do but enjoy ourselves as much as we can."

"It's a cold day when I can't enjoy myself on an affair of this kind," chipped in Tom, with a cheerful grin.

"There's going to be dancing," said Eva. "And I do love to dance."

"With Fred," said Tom slyly.

"Oh, with anybody that's nice," replied Eva, with a deep blush.

"Well, how do I suit?" chuckled Tom.

"You will have to get Edith's permission first."

"Oh, come off! I'm not tied to her apron strings."

"Aren't you?" tittered Eva. "I thought you were her exclusive property."

"You did, eh? How about Fred and yourself? You nearly had a fit the day we went to Plainville and he fell through that hole in the closet."

Eva blushed to her hair, and Fred hastened to her rescue.

"Don't mind him, Eva," he said. "Tom is only kidding you."

The musicians now started up a popular air and about half the girls in their immediate vicinity began to hum the tune or sing the words.

When the music stopped the girls and boys resumed their chattering like a lot of magpies.

And thus the time was passed until the island was reached and all debarked and hurried to the grove.

There was a covered dancing platform in the center of the grove, and as soon as the musicians had established themselves in a small gallery at one end dancing was in order.

Fred, Tom and the girls stayed here till intermission for lunch, and after they had eaten the good things they brought with them they started for a stroll up the island, which was a long and narrow one.

It was almost entirely covered by trees, which grew very thick in some spots.

Therefore it was not hard for two couples, like the boys and their charmers, to get separated when one pair lagged behind the other.

Fred and Eva did not notice for some time that Tom and Edith had dropped out of sight.

When they did discover that they were alone they were some distance from the grove where most of the picnickers were, and nearly at the extremity of the island.

"Hello," said Fred at last, "we've lost Tom and Edith. We'd better sit down and wait for them to come up."

So they perched themselves on a big rock and resumed their conversation.

Suddenly a face was thrust out of the bushes behind them.

It was a haggard-looking countenance, with two or three weeks' growth of beard.

A second hard-looking face followed, and the two men looked at the young people.

They stepped softly out of the bushes and advanced upon the unconscious couple.

Suddenly Fred and Eva were both seized by the men, who pressed a hand across their mouths, to prevent any outcry on their part.

Fred instantly recognized their assailants as Jim Harker and his friend Bill, the murderers of Abel Ashfield.

But that wasn't the only surprise the young people were treated to just then.

Two boys pushed their way out of the bushes and came forward.

Fred and Eva easily identified them as Jude Ferguson and Slatts Morton.

It was a disquieting situation for Fred, and a terrifying one for Eva.

What were these men, aided by Fred's personal enemies, going to do with them?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TABLES TURNED.

Fred, when he was first seized, had started to put up a struggle, but he soon discovered that Jim Harker had muscles of steel, and that he was practically powerless in his grip.

As for Eva, she could do nothing in the grasp of the man Bill.

Addressing Jude and Morton, Harker ordered them to each get hold of one of Fred's legs and help carry him off.

With grins of satisfaction they obeyed, and then Harker started with this prisoner for the bushes.

Bill followed with Eva, and in this order the procession moved off.

A short distance behind the fringe of bushes was a little creek, and in this creek lay a large cat-boat, her mast hidden among the trees.

The prisoners were carried on board the boat and into the cabin, where they were released, and the sliding door shut upon them after their captors had withdrawn.

There was a locker that looked like a lounge on either side of the cabin, and on one of these Fred had been placed, while Eva was left on the other.

As soon as their enemies went into the cockpit outside and shut the sliding door, Eva ran over to Fred and, throwing one arm around his neck, looked into his face.

"Do you think they will keep us on board this boat some time?" she asked anxiously.

"I guess that's their intention. In fact, judging from the sounds I hear, I am afraid that they propose to carry us away from the island right away."

"If they do that Fred," said Eva nervously, "we'll not be able to get home. How could we get off the island if the steamer went off without us?"

"If that was all I expected to have to worry about in connection with this matter, I wouldn't feel a bit broke up, for I'd find a way to get off this island and take you with me."

"How could you if they left us here?"

"I can't explain now but I'd manage it somehow. We're in the river now. Do you hear them raising the sail?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, we're leaving the island, all right. What their next move will be is a matter of considerable interest to me. I wonder if we could find something in this cabin that would help us stand those rascals off? If we had a couple of stout pieces of wood that would answer for cudgels I think we could prevent those chaps from entering the cabin. The door is too narrow for them to make a combined rush. They can only get in one at a time. Now, a good club apiece, or even one club in my hands, would give them a whole lot of trouble. Look in that locker on the other side and see what's in it. I'll examine this one. Perhaps luck will stand by us."

"I don't know what you mean by a locker, Fred," said Eva.

"Why, the space under these lounges. See, there's a flap that lets down."

Fred suited the action to the word by opening the locker on which they had been sitting.

A thrill of satisfaction ran through the boy's nerves for the very first thing he saw was a revolver lying on top of a box.

He grabbed it up in a twinkling.

"This is fine," he exclaimed. "I couldn't have asked for anything better. Now I'll be able to stand them off in great shape, for every chamber is loaded with a half-ounce ball."

Eva was also greatly pleased that they had something to defend themselves with.

There was nothing else in the locker that was of any use to them.

"Well, let's look in the other. A knife would be better than nothing for you to help me out with," he said. "Nobody likes to run against one."

Fred opened the opposite locker and there, to his surprise, was another revolver, fully loaded like the other.

He had it out in a moment.

"Have you the nerve to use this, Eva?"

She looked at it doubtfully.

"Wouldn't you dare shoot if you thought my life was in danger?"

That appeal nerved her at once.

"Yes," she said resolutely. "I'd shoot every one of them sooner than let them harm you."

"Spoken like a brave little girl. Here, take it. It may not be necessary to shoot, for a person can put up a mighty good bluff with a cocked revolver that looks ready for business. We'll only shoot as a last resort. I think when we point them at our captors they'll be glad to leave us alone."

While they were planning to surprise their enemies the cat-boat, under the influence of a gentle breeze, was sailing down the river toward Plainville.

Jim Harker, who was the leading spirit on board, seemed to be in no hurry to enlighten his prisoners as to their ultimate fate.

Jude and Morton were conversing together, and they seemed to be greatly tickled at having Fred Towne in their power.

"This is where we'll take some of the starch out of him," said Ferguson.

"Bet your life we will," answered Morton. "We owe him a whole lot."

"Jim Harker owes him a whole lot, too, and he's goin' to make him sweat."

"We can look on and enjoy the fun. What do you s'pose he's goin' to do to him?"

"I dunno; but I heard him say he's goin' to get square with him for eucherin' him and Bill out of the swag they got from the old miser's house."

"What a chump he was to turn all that over to the police! If you and me had found it, I'll bet we'd never have given up a cent. There was \$20,000 in money. Why, that would have carried us to New York, and given us no end of a swell time. Then we could have pawned the other stuff, which the papers said was worth \$10,000."

"Sure we could, if we'd been in Towne's shoes. I hain't heard that he ever got a cent for givin' the valise up. I'll bet the police made somethin' out of it."

"You can bet they did. The police ain't such wise guys after all. Jim Harker and Bill Tweed has been hid on that island ever since they escaped from the mill, and the cops hain't troubled them even a little bit."

"Nor they haven't got onto us, either," interjected Ferguson gleefully. "As soon as Harker thinks it safe we'll all light out for Chicago. I guess we kin have a good time there, for Jim proposed to show us the ropes."

"I guess we can. Well, it's too bad that we didn't finish up Koop's office when we had the chance. It would have made a fine bon-fire, and no one would have suspected us. I don't see how Towne happened to get on to us. It was rotten luck."

The boat was now nearing the creek that ran up to the old mill.

They soon steered into it, and the wind failing them, Harker worked up alongside the bank and sent the two boys ashore with a line to tow the cat-boat up to the mill.

It happened that Fred was watching all that was going on outside through a slit in the door slide.

The present moment looked propitious for him to make a sudden move.

Jude and Morton were on the bank and couldn't very well interfere in favor of their rascally associates.

Fred went to Eva and told her what he was going to do and what he expected of her.

"I hate to ask this of you, Eva, but I'm afraid if we don't do something effective right away these scoundrels may get the better of me, and if once they get me into the cellar of the mill they'll half kill me, even if they don't finish me entirely. I think you care for me, little girl, just as I care for you, and I am sure it would hurt you to have anything happen to me."

"Oh, Fred, Fred," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck and bursting into tears, "it would break my heart if you were injured by these men. I love you with all my heart, and I'll willingly die to save you."

She clung convulsively to him, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"And I love you very dearly, too, and will protect you with my life. Now, brace up and let us take the bull by the horns. With such men as they are are we can't take any chances. I feel sure that we'll be justified in shooting them in order to save ourselves."

Eva dried her tears and promised to be brave.

Then Fred moved over to the slide, which was not fastened, followed by the girl.

He threw it open suddenly and stepped out into the cockpit before the rascals suspected anything was going to happen.

With a fierce imprecation, both men started to their feet and advanced toward Fred.

"Stop where you are and throw up your hands!" cried Fred, taking the revolver from under his jacket and covering Harker, while Eva, standing in the opening of the cabin entrance, aimed her gun at Bill.

To say that the rascals were thunderstruck and disconcerted would but faintly describe their consternation at that thrilling moment.

CHAPTER XV.

FRED GETS THE UPPER HAND OF HIS ENEMIES.

Jim Harker looked into the muzzle of the revolver and then at the resolute boy, who showed plainly that he meant business.

"Throw up your hands, both of you," repeated Fred. "If you think I don't mean to shoot, just take another step. I'm going to take no chances with you at all, so if you value your lives do as I tell you."

Reluctantly the men raised their arms—they couldn't help themselves.

"Come out, Eva," said Fred, "and get on the roof of the cabin."

She did so.

"Now cover the rascals while I get up beside you," he continued. "And if they make a move, don't hesitate to shoot."

Jude and Morton were by this time aware of what was going on in the boat, and were both surprised and alarmed when they saw the revolvers in the hands of the late prisoners.

Somehow or another it didn't occur to them to make a break for cover on their own account.

Probably they were too bewildered by the unexpected turn in affairs to think.

Fred sprang quickly on to the roof of the cabin and, facing the scoundrels, ordered them into the cabin.

Harker glared at him viciously.

If ever there was murder in a man's eyes it was in his at that moment.

And Bill looked as if he would not have hesitated to choke the life out of the boy if he could have got his fingers about his neck.

"Come, now, I've got you two dead to rights. Get into the cabin or take the consequences."

"You'll live to regret this, young fellow," said Harker darkly.

"I'll give you one minute to start yourselves," returned Fred, in a determined tone. "I know what I'm up against, and I'm not to be trifled with. I'm just in the mood to shoot you fellows, so take notice."

Jim Harker sullenly came forward and entered the cabin.

"Now you get in there, too," cried Fred to Bill.

The rascal obeyed very grudgingly.

"Keep your eye on those boys, Eva," said Fred, "and shoot them if they try to get away."

Fred sprang down into the cockpit and slammed the sliding door shut.

"Now, you Jude and Morton, come this way," said Fred, addressing them sharply.

They refused to budge.

"You'll do what I tell you or I'll put a ball into you," roared Towne.

"You wouldn't dare," snarled Jude.

Fred lost patience with them, and, raising the revolver, quickly fired, sending the ball close by their heads.

Jude fell and lay cowering on the ground.

"Oh, Fred!" cried Eva, "you've shot him."

"No, I haven't. Get up there, Jude, or the next time I'll fetch you in earnest."

Ferguson, trembling like an aspen leaf, got on his feet.

"Now, come this way at once," ordered Fred. "And hold on to that rope."

The boys, thoroughly cowed, no longer refused to do his bidding.

"Pull the bow of the boat around so it will head down the creek. Keep your eye on the cabin door, Eva. If those rascals open it, shoot."

The boat was soon turned around.

"Now, then, start off and haul her down to the river," said Fred.

Jude and Morton did not dare object, and they started off, rope in hand.

At length the boat reached the entrance to the river.

"Jump aboard, you chaps, by way of the bow, and hoist the sail," cried Fred to Jude and Morton.

They both hesitated to obey this order, for they had recovered their self-possession and were calculating on making their escape.

"I'll give you half a minute to do as I order you. If you hold off, I'll put a bullet through your leg or arm."

That settled the matter.

Fred could easily wing them at that short distance, and neither Ferguson nor Morton cared to take any chances.

So they sprang aboard, one after the other, and hoisted the sail.

The wind catching the canvas sent the boat out into the river.

As we have already remarked, the breeze was quite light, and the cat-boat went along on her return course at no great speed.

"Sit down where you are and keep quiet," said Fred to Jude and his companion.

"Say, what are you goin' to do with us?" asked Morton.

"I think it's about time you two returned to Leesburg," replied Fred.

"We don't want to go there," objected Morton. "Put us ashore and we'll never trouble you any more."

"You won't trouble me any more, anyway, if I can help myself."

"It ain't a fair deal to hand us over to the police," said Morton. "Give us a show, can't you?"

"It's my duty to take charge of you chaps and turn you over to the Leesburg authorities, since the chance has come my way."

"All right. You do it and some day we'll get hunk with you," snarled Morton.

"Shut up," replied Fred. "I've heard enough from you."

Morton turned to Jude and the two entered into a low conversation.

"Just keep your eye on them, Eva. They'll try to work some dodge if they can, and I don't mean to give them the opportunity if I can help it."

"What are you going to do, Fred?" asked the girl.

"I'm going to keep on up to the wharf where the steamboat is lying and have the captain of the boat take charge of these chaps."

"I'm glad of that," answered Eva, who was anxious to see the last of them.

"He'll see to it that they won't get away after I have explained who they are."

"I hope so," she replied.

"I'll tell him to send a couple of the deck hands with ropes to bind them, then they'll be safe enough. He can stow them down in the hold somewhere until we return to Leesburg and notify the police."

At that moment the sliding door was pushed wide open and Jim Harker sprang out, closely followed by Bill.

Each held a bottle by the neck, and there was blood in their eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

The rascals had been planning this move while Fred was talking to Morton, and since then they had been watching Towne through a slit in the door.

Seeing him in conversation with Eva, they thought they would be able to take him off his guard by a sudden rush.

They made a mistake, however, in the boy they were dealing with.

He was not off his guard a single instant, and the moment Harker sprang out at him he raised his revolver and deliberately fired at the ruffian.

Harker clapped his hand to his breast, and with a cry staggered and fell in his tracks.

"Now, you go back," said Fred to Bill, "or I'll give you a dose of the same medicine."

The rascal saw that he was at the boy's mercy, so he backed into the cabin and pulled the slide to again.

Eva had uttered a startled cry when Harker and his companion burst out on them, and another when Fred fired the shot that laid the murderer out.

Harker was a terrible-looking object as he groaned and twisted about in his agony, and Eva shuddered and turned her head away.

"He brought it on himself," said Fred. "I simply had to fire. In another moment he would have brained me with that bottle."

"Do you think he will die?" asked the girl.

"I don't know whether he will or not; and if it wasn't that I don't like to have any man's blood on my hands, I wouldn't care. Such scoundrels are better in their graves than on earth, where their presence is a constant menace."

Jude and Morton had sprung to their feet when the men made their rush, and they were ready to jump in and help them as soon as they could do it without danger.

The shooting of Harker and the retreat of Bill convinced them that they had better not butt in, so they got well forward and hung on by the mast.

They saw that Fred was not going to stand any nonsense, and that he had nerve enough to shoot to kill, if necessary.

The shot and confusion on board the cat-boat attracted the attention of several of the picnic party on the island, and there was instantly great excitement along shore.

Consequently, when Fred ran the cat alongside the steamer, there was a crowd of boys on hand to see what was the matter.

Fred was recognized by several, and they were astonished to see him standing with a revolver in his hand, and a wounded man at his feet.

Towne called a deck-hand over.

"Will you tell the captain or the mate to come here. I've caught the murderers of Abel Ashfield."

The mate hurried off to see the captain, and presently that gentleman appeared.

Fred went over his story again.

The captain called up several of his hands and had the prisoners removed to the steamer, secured and placed in the hold, that is except Harker, who was so dangerously wounded that he was carried to one of the small staterooms and a superficial examination made of his wound.

He was made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and a man sent off to a neighboring village to get a doctor to attend him.

The physician, when he arrived, extracted the ball and bound the wound up.

Two hours later the boat reached her wharf at Leesburg.

The police were summoned to take charge of the prisoners.

Jim Harker was removed to the station-house in an express wagon, and Fred and Eva had to go along with the party in order to give the police an account of the affair.

The town had offered a reward of \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Harker and Bill, and this was subsequently paid over to Fred.

Mr. George Ashfield had also offered a reward of \$5,000 for the same purpose, and Fred got that, too, after the rascals were tried and convicted.

Bill was allowed to turn State's evidence, and he got off with twenty years in the State prison, while Jim Harker was eventually executed for his crime.

Jude Ferguson and Morton were tried, convicted, and sent to a reformatory for a term of several years.

Mr. Koop seemed to have taken quite a fancy to Towne, and he was delighted to learn that the young firebugs had been captured through Fred's plucky efforts.

After their conviction he presented the young printer with a gold watch and chain, and assured him that he had a steady job in the office as long as he chose to stay there.

On Sunday night following the picnic, when Fred and Eva were returning from church together, the boy said:

"Do you remember what you said to me yesterday while we were prisoners in the cabin of the cat-boat? You threw your arms around my neck and said you loved me with all your heart, and that you'd willingly die to save me. Did you mean that?"

Eva was silent a moment and then she said: "Yes, I did mean it."

"And I said, 'And I love you very dearly, too, and will protect you with my life.' Do you remember that also?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

"You believe I meant it, don't you?" he said.

"Yes."

"Are we going to always love each other very dearly?" he asked.

"I hope so."

"And may I ask your mother if I can have you for my wife some day?"

"Yes, if you really and truly want me."

"Of course I really and truly want you. Aren't you certain of that?"

"Yes, Fred."

One night that week Fred put the momentous question before Mrs. Valentine.

As Eva wore a diamond ring a few days afterward on her engagement finger it is to be presumed that Fred received a favorable reply from "Mama."

Fred continued to attend strictly to advancing himself in his business, and by the first of the following year he had improved so much that Mr. Koop advanced him to \$12 per week, which was as much as he paid a couple of his men jobbers.

The average pay his regular hands received was \$15, only one man getting \$16.

In the course of time one of the organizers of the International Typographical Union came to Leesburg and succeeded in establishing a union.

It led to a general strike in town for higher wages and shorter hours.

Nearly all of Koop's employees, including Fred and Tom, had joined the union, and as Mr. Koop refused to grant their demands they quit work.

The strike continued for several weeks, and then the offices gave in one after the other until only Mr. Koop's remained non-union.

He swore he'd never give in and he meant it.

Finally, one morning the papers announced the sudden death of Mr. Koop, from heart failure.

The widow tried to run the office, but did not find it a profitable job.

Fred heard that it was to be sold at public auction.

He immediately called on Mrs. Koop and made her an offer for the office, agreeing to pay \$5,000 down and the balance in certain equal payments covering several years.

His offer was accepted.

As soon as Fred got possession he notified his union that hereafter "Koop's Printing Office," the name of which he proposed to retain, would be a strictly union shop, and there was great rejoicing among the craft at the next meeting.

Fred put Tom in as foreman of his composing-room, hired as many of the old hands as would return as soon as trade warranted it, and started out to build up the business to its former proportions.

And he did build it up until every press in the house was running full time, and every job that he turned out bore the union label.

To-day "Koop's Printing House" is the largest, not only in Leesburg, but in that section of the State, and Fred Towne is considered one of the solid men of the town.

He has a fine residence on the suburbs, and it is hardly necessary to say that Eva is mistress of it.

Tom is superintendent of the entire business, and his home, which is not far from Fred's, is presided over by Edith, whose name once was Clark.

In a gold frame, hanging against the wall of Fred's library, is a large silver coin.

Both Fred and his wife would rather part with anything else in the house than that, for they regard it as their most valued possession, although it is ONLY A DOLLAR.

THE END.

Read "PRICE & CO., BOY BROKERS; OR, THE YOUNG TRADERS OF WALL STREET," which will be the next number (100) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

A company has been formed to produce alcohol from currants in Greece. The spirit has proved of great use as an illuminant, for heating and for driving small engines.

The first use of the egg on Easter is credited to the early Christians about the fifth or sixth century. As it contains the elements of future life, it was used as an emblem of the resurrection. But long before the time of Christ the egg was a symbol of the renovation of mankind after the deluge. The Jews used the egg as an emblem of their departure from the land of Egypt, and it was used in the feast of the Passover. The Greeks, Romans, Russians, Hindoos and Chinese all use the egg as an emblem in one way or another.

The use of the term pin money, if not the thing it represents, dates from the fourteenth century, when pins were invented. They were allowed to be sold on only two days, the first and second of January, and were so expensive that only the wealthy could use them regularly. After a time it became a custom, however, when a woman was to be married, to give her certain sums of money to be used for the purchase of pins.

A cow which John Tukes, of Butler Valley, Pa., was driving to pasture stepped on the tail of a rattlesnake, and the enraged reptile turned on Tukes, who fled to the barn. The snake chased him to the door, which Tukes closed. Tukes was held a prisoner a half hour before the snake ceased its rattling and went away.

Resembling in appearance and action a jackrabbit is a Nebraska calf, according to all accounts. It has no tail, and its hind legs are longer than its front ones. It gets over the ground in leaps and bounds.

In nearly every country, until comparatively recent times, debtors have been subject to imprisonment. After the panic of 1825, one hundred and one thousand writs for debt were issued in England. In 1830, seven thousand persons were sent to London prisons for debt, and on January 1, 1840, seventeen hundred persons were held for debt in England and Wales, one thousand in Ireland, and less than one hundred in Scotland. From time to time modifications in the laws governing the imprisonment of debtors have been made, so that fewer debtors are imprisoned for this crime each year. In 1829 there were three thousand debtors in prison in Massachusetts, ten thousand in New York, seven thousand in Pennsylvania, three thousand in Maryland, and a like proportion in other States. Many of these persons were jailed for debts of one dollar. The law providing for the imprisonment of men who could not pay their debts was shown to be impracticable by statistics taken from Philadelphia, where in 1828 there were one thousand and eighty-five debtors imprisoned

for debts amounting to twenty-five thousand dollars. The expense of keeping these persons in confinement was three hundred and sixty-two thousand dollars, which was paid by the city, and the amount recovered by this method was two hundred and ninety-five dollars. Imprisonment for debt was abolished by Congress in the United States in 1833, though this measure was not fully enforced until 1839.

Queen Victoria of Spain does not know the taste of alcohol. Her special "tippie" is made from oranges—the fresh fruit squeezed into a glass, which is filled with aerated waters. Oranges are her favorite fruit. For years Princess Henry of Battenberg was a teetotaler, but of late she has suffered so from rheumatism that she has been ordered a little whisky, which she regards as a penance. Both Princess Christian's daughters, too, are teetotalers, and they know nothing of alcohols. Princess Patricia of Connaught and her married sister also abjure wine. Another royal teetotaler is the Duchess of Argyll and the two daughters of the Princess Royal, their Highnesses Alexandria and Maud, have never in their lives touched wine.

The will of the late General Lew Wallace, famous as the author of "Ben Hur," contained just four sentences, in which all his property was left to his wife without conditions.

The deepest lake in the United Kingdom is Loch Moray, which is 1,017 feet deep. Only seven deeper lakes are known in Europe, four being in Norway and three in Italy.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Mrs. Gadd—Are you goin' to send little Jack to Mrs. Thorn's school again?

Mrs. Gabb—Indeed, I won't. He went to her all last year, and I paid her \$60 for it, and the mean, stingy thing didn't give him a single prize, not one, and they don't cost but a couple o' dollars, either.

"Thank you, Franz, but the ring is too small for me."

"That's too bad, Lizzie. Now I'll have to get another sweet heart."

Scott—What an absurd remark! You don't really believe that inanimate things can cherish delusions?

Mott—I do. I'll swear my furnace thinks it's a refrigerator.

Once in a while you see a girl who doesn't care if people know how old she is. She is usually seventeen.

Two well dressed men one Sunday morning were returning home from a church where the rector of a neighboring parish had preached, says *Chums*. One man proceeded to criticise the sermon, remarking in a contemptuous tone that it was "deplorably weak," and that "such incompetent men ought not to be allowed to preach to such a well educated congregation."

The speaker was not allowed to proceed further, however, for his son and heir, who happened to see his father's contribution to the collection, chimed in with: "But you can't expect much for a penny, father."

"You seem to be downcast," said the coal man.

"Yes," replied the ice man; "it makes me sad to think of the high prices we shall have to charge the people next summer owing to the failure of the crop we are busy harvesting."

"This here," said the policeman, "is what I found on him, Your Honor—a jimmy, a lantern, a centrebit and a piece of lead pipe, all wrapped in a newspaper to look like a bundle of groceries."

The prisoner drew himself up proudly.

"Do not, Your Honor," he exclaimed, "convict me on such worthless evidence as that. I am an honest automobilist, and the articles mentioned are nothing but my lamp and repair kit."

FORETOLD

OR,
THE FORTUNE TELLER OF SALEM

A STORY OF THE OLDEN TIME.

By Horace Appleton.

"Woe to the house of Dykeman! Woe to the pride of the wealthy and the proud. For they shall fall, and great will be that fall. Woe to you, proud sir."

Anthony Dykeman, ship owner and the wealthiest man of Colonial days in Salem, reined in his horse in the gloom of the narrow street in utter amazement as this astounding declaration came to him from the darkness upon his left.

For a moment a chill as of superstitious dread assailed him and he could not act or speak. Then he saw a dark form huddled in the shadows against the walls of a house.

"How now!" he cried, angrily, "who art thou who dares to blacken the night even deeper with thy revilings at an honest passer-by? Speak, or by my word thou shalt feel my staff!"

There was a moment of silence. Dykeman, a tall, patrician-looking man of fifty reined in his horse nearer.

Then up from the shadows rose a tall, slender form.

In the dim starlight he saw an ancient face, white and drawn, wrinkled and haggard to ghastliness. A long shawl of black covered the form of the crone from head to foot.

"Deborah Dane, the fortune teller" gasped the proud ship owner, as half involuntarily he drew back.

"Ay, you know me well, Anthony Dykeman!" declared the woman, in her quavering voice, "and I know you. Perhaps I know more of you than you would have me!"

"What dost thou mean, witch?" cried the ship owner angrily. "Forbear not to treat me with respect, for to-morrow's sun might see you upon the gibbet were I to say the word."

The woman did not flinch or even cringe and her deep set eyes seemed to burn stronger and brighter in their hollow sockets.

"Call me witch if you will, brand me, kill me, do what you will, I would welcome such a fate rather than stand in your steps and face the fate which destiny and a vengeful power has decreed for you."

For a moment Dykeman's face was pallid. There was a power and a depth in the woman's declaration which seemed to overawe and convince him.

His anger half resolved itself into curiosity and fear.

"How now?" he said sternly. "Wherefore such a threat? Canst back it up with evidence?"

"Time will tell," replied the crone, waving her staff fancifully. "Go back in thy memory, Anthony Dykeman. Recall a scene twenty years ago when thou wast an apprentice in the employ of thy master, Royal Bracebridge, who then owned the ships thou dost own to-day, who then was the magnate of Salem and thou an underling?"

The weak old voice cracked and the woman paused as if for breath. Dykeman had grown suddenly interested. He bent over the pommel of his saddle and regarded the old fortune teller darkly.

"Thou canst remember it well," went on the fortune teller. "Aspirations were thine in those days. You loved Amy, the beautiful daughter of Royal Bracebridge. You sued for her hand and were rejected. You swore an oath of revenge."

A hiss escaped Dykeman's lips.

"By my faith!" he gritted, "into what archives of the past have you delved to gain all that information?"

"Wait, Anthony Dykeman. With the rejection of your suit you lived but for one end. That was revenge. Avarice and foul intent clogged the better motives of your heart."

"Dost recall that last voyage of the Sea Gull from which Royal Bracebridge never returned? Dost thou remember how you were the only witness of his death?—the only man to

swear that the night he went overboard it was by accident? You swore to that!"

The hag shook her staff in the face of Dykeman. The magnate seemed frozen with a species of horror. All the hardness of his nature vanished.

"Well," he managed to say, in a gritting voice, "and what of that? Go on!"

"I will!" continued Deborah Dane, "palsied be my tongue, if I speak not what my heart contains. When the Sea Gull returned who broke the direful news to sweet Amy? Who played the part of false friend and champion, usurped the business and the fortune, ruined the estate of Bracebridge, and falsely betrayed Amy Bracebridge into a marriage. Who then cruelly mistreated her and drove her down to her grave? And your son, by that marriage, where is he?"

Anthony Dykeman was now corpse-like in hue, and trembled like one with vertigo. He reined the horse nearer as if he would trample the old fortune-teller under the iron-shod hoofs.

"How darest thou breathe such things to me?" he hissed. "My son was wild and rebellious. He took the traits from his mother. Five years ago, at the age of fifteen, he ran away to sea. I have not seen him since. I have cursed him!"

"And that curse will return upon thee!"

"What?"

"Hear me!" cried the fortune-teller, impressively. "It is written that retribution will come to thee, for thou art false husband, cruel father, thief and murderer!"

A hoarse, wild cry broke from Dykeman's lips. He reeled and nearly fell from the saddle.

"Hist! For the love of God, do not brand me thus upon the public street. Listening ears may be near. Curses on the hag! Thou shalt simmer and burn for this! Witch thou art, and the Council shall decree thy fate at the stake."

Fierce, hot and with hatred was the denunciation given. But the aged woman's face seemed even more celestial in the starlight, even more within a halo.

"Back, Anthony Dykeman!" she cried, shrilly, raising her staff. "You are too great a coward to attack me in this street. I fear thee not, and now do foretell thy horrid fate. Woe to thee! Woe to her who lives with thee, knowing thy iniquities. Thou shalt fall within the month. Satan hath set his trip for thee, and in its net thou art. Limb from limb thou shalt be torn, to gorge the appetites of wild beasts thy body shall be given, within the month! Mark my words. They will fail not. Woe—woe to thee and thine!"

The prophecy was given with wonderful force and precision by the fortune teller, and in a manner which carried conviction. It was the age of superstition. Dykeman was not free from it. He trembled and reeled back with horror, as if stricken with a curse from heaven.

"Take back the words—the curse!" he cried, wildly. "Thou limb of Satan, how darest thou thus brand me? Curses on thee! Thou shalt never curse another."

Dykeman lashed the horse with all his might. A moment more and the fortune teller would have been beneath the iron-shod hoofs.

But a lithe form leaped from the shadows. A youth it was who grasped the steed's rein and threw him upon his haunches.

"For shame!" rose a ringing young voice. "Who art thou dares strike a defenseless old woman? By my word, I'll pull thee from thy horse into the dust if thou darest to harm a hair of her head."

The rescuer was a tall youth, clad in the garb of a sailor. He had the air of one who had traveled in foreign climes.

Dykeman's anger in a measure subsided.

"Have done with the bridle of my horse!" he cried, sternly. "Dost know whom thou art playing Malapert to?"

"It can be no gentleman who will attack a harmless old woman," retorted the youth.

"But she cursed me!"

"Maybe you deserved that."

"How now! Wilt thou insult me? Of what ship art thou?"

"The Hector, lying at the foot of this street, this day from Trinidad. If thou wilt report me, do so on the morrow. I stand not in fear of our master, who is a fair man and doubt-

less will greet thee with a rope's end when thou hast told thy story."

And the youth laughed merrily.

"Thou and thy master shall answer to me on the morrow!" gritted Dykeman, reining his horse into the street. "This is not the last!"

"And I were sorry if it were," retorted the brave young sailor. "How now, good mother? Brace thyself, and be of cheer, for thy troubles are adjusted. This for thy cheer!"

A gold piece rang upon the pavement at the beldame's feet. But she did not offer to pick it up.

The sailor gave one startled glance at her pallid face, so rigid and drawn, as she stood there looking up to the starlit sky.

With never a word more he turned away and strode on up the street. It happened that he reached the corner even with Anthony Dykeman's slow-walking horse. And each turned in an opposite direction, leaving Deborah Dane, the old fortune teller, still standing there with her face rigidly upturned to the starlit sky.

Dykeman's thoughts were of the blackest kind as he rode homeward.

"The plague upon the old witch!" he muttered. "She knows too much of my affairs for safety. I must put her out of the way!"

Arrived home, he rehearsed the affair to his wife, of course, from whom he was able to keep none of his affairs.

Mistress Dykeman was a shrewd and calculating woman. There were few her equal for diplomacy and craft in all the country about.

Moreover, her ends were often base, and she would stoop even lower than her avaricious husband to carry a desired purpose.

"A pest upon the old hag!" she gritted. "Thou shalt tomorrow make application to the Council, and she shall share the fate of her craft, with that she is."

Thus adjured, Dykeman the next day repaired to the chambers of the Council. His appearance before that august body met with special favor, and who should dare to gainsay his word in the warrant that Deborah Dane was tainted with witchcraft?

What mattered to him if he did swear falsely to the itching pains inflicted upon him by Deborah Dane's witchcraft. His word satisfied the Council.

That day half a score of the unfortunate accused were to be burned upon Gibbet Hill.

Early in the day a guard of soldiers broke into the humble cot of Deborah Dane. Rudely she was dragged forth, and tied to a cart she was dragged through the streets.

Foremost in the throng was her accuser, Dykeman. His face shone with a species of deadly hatred.

"With her death my secret will be safe," he muttered darkly; "this hour she shall burn!"

By his orders a stake had been driven. His money paid for the fuel hauled. A hireling of his was to apply the torch.

Deborah Dane did not make speech as all this great wrong was put upon her. Only her pallid ancient face was turned upward all the way.

She was lashed rudely to the stake. The fagots were piled about her, even to her waist.

"Death to the witch!" yelled the crowd. Dykeman felt secure.

"Light the pile!" he gritted to his hireling.

The fellow was about to obey. Already the torch was in his hand.

But at that moment a stout, hardy young voice rang out.

"Hold! What are ye blockheads doing?"

The crowd parted as if by magic. Down into the clear space came a sturdy, strong-armed youth. His honest blue eyes blazed with fire.

The crowd seemed literally to cower before him. Dykeman drew his sword with rage.

"What are ye doing to this good mother!" shouted the young sailor of the Hector, for he it was. "Cowards! dare ye offer her harm? Not until ye have killed me first."

"Stand aside, stripling!" roared Anthony Dykeman, savagely. "Know ye that the law has condemned her to death?"

"For what libel?"

"She is a witch!"

"And I say you lie!" cried the young sailor, forcibly. "She is no witch, but an honest woman, and here's my life to defend her!"

Dykeman lunged at the sailor. But the latter skilfully caught the blade in his bare hand and snapped it like a twig. Then each looked into the other's eyes.

Dykeman gave one look, and then reeled back aghast and trembling.

"Furies!" he hissed. "My own son! It is Ernest!"

"Yes, my unnatural father!" cried the young sailor, tensely and bitterly, "I have returned to find you in good business. Burning old women at the stake. Faugh! You once disowned and dishonored me. Now I retaliate, and I forswear you!"

A great hush fell upon the crowd. A revulsion of feeling was fast coming in favor of the young sailor.

Without a word further, Ernest Dykeman turned and cut the bonds of Deborah Dane.

"Come, good mother!" he said, with all the gallantry he would have displayed for the prettiest girl in Salem that day, "I will see you safely to your home."

Then the crowd opened their throats in one loud cheer. But before its echoes had died away, the people gave way, and a tall, aged man entered the circle.

He raised his right hand and pointed to Anthony Dykeman.

"My fellow townsmen!" he cried, in a strong voice which went to every quarter, "there stands the wretch who sought to murder me on board the Sea Gull, twenty years ago. But God favored me, spared my life, and I have returned home after twenty years to denounce my foe. Anthony Dykeman, you know me!"

"The devil forfend! It is Royal Bracebridge! Back from the dead!"

"Ay!" cried the wronged man, "back to claim my own and call you to account."

Then Deborah Dane raised one long gaunt arm, and fixed her burning gaze upon Anthony Dykeman, the usurper. The curse had fallen. The prophecy was enacted.

Anthony Dykeman did not wait to face the victim of his vile schemes further; with an awful soul-harrowing cry, he turned and dashed down the hill.

Before any one could stay him, he sprang upon a horse near. Away he rode out of the town, out of sight.

And as he rode, a madness, a sort of frenzy seized him. He laughed and shrieked in his insanity. The horse, left to his own device, dashed into a dense wood.

And here, as the chronicle has it, of a sudden, Dykeman's head came in fearful contact with an overhanging limb.

He was dashed to the ground with a broken neck. The end had come.

That night wolves found his remains, and naught was left of them by daybreak but a heap of bones.

These were found the next day by the searching party. It was certainly a fearful ending.

Royal Bracebridge had not been drowned that night he was thrown over the Sea Gull's rail by his treacherous clerk.

He had swam for some while and then encountered a spar. Drifting, he was picked up by a Malay vessel. Pressed into their service he next was made a slave. From one part of the world to the other fate carried him, until after twenty years he had at last reached home.

Many friends and neighbors welcomed him. But his wife and daughter were dead. However, the courts dispossessed the relic of Anthony Dykeman of her unlawful wealth and gave it over to its rightful owner, Royal Bracebridge.

Once more Bracebridge became the wealthy ship-owner of Salem. But he was aged and growing feeble, and feeling the need of a strong arm and a trusty heart, offered a partnership to Ernest Dykeman, who had all his mother's fine traits.

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